THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER

By

Dom Godefroid Bélorgey, O.C.S.O.

With Foreword by

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Foreword

by Dom Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

There are few needs of the present day so urgent as that of developing and deepening the interior life among all classes of Christians—not merely among priests and religious, but also among the laity. Two Cistercian Abbots have, in recent times, written books on the subject which have become classics. Dom Jean Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O., underlined the need for the interior life in his well-known book, *The Soul of the Apostolate;* Dom Vital Lehodey, O.C.S.O,, explained the nature and practice of mental prayer in *The Ways of Mental Prayer.* A third Cistercian Abbot, Dom Godefroid Bélorgey, O.C.S.O., has recently given us a book which is of no lesser importance or value than the works of his two fellow Cistercians, and of which the following pages are an English translation. The opening chapters, however, of the French original have been omitted and we replaced them by this foreword.

The author points out that a life of prayer is necessary even for ordinary Christians who wish to live their life properly. It is true that many live this life of prayer more or less unconsciously, but its essential elements can be identified. They reflect now and then on religious truths which they have heard or have read; they apply them to their conduct and try to mould their life by them according to God's will. The frequent use of the Sacraments feeds their spiritual life, and they pray often without knowing it, for one can pray with the mind and the will without using one's lips.

Those who more consciously devote themselves to God and to His service are more definite in their use of mental prayer. In this they are only following the teaching of all the great masters of the spiritual life, who are unanimous and unhesitating in their insistence on the need for such prayer. St. Teresa sums up their teaching when she writes: "There is only one way to find God and that is by prayer; if any one points out another way, he is leading you astray." (*Way of Perfection,* Chapter XXII). And in our own times Dom Columba Marmion warns us that, "our progress in the love of God depends, *in practice,* on our life of prayer." (cf. *Christ the Life of the Soul.)* What the masters taught by their words, the Saints showed by their example, and both are only following the doctrine and example of Our Divine Master and Model, Jesus Christ, of whose filial prayer to His Heavenly Father, the Gospels arc full. Which doctrine and example were most perfectly followed in a more hidden way by Our Lady, uniting Herself continuously to God's will, keeping and pondering in Her Heart all Her Son's words and deeds.

Mental prayer is for us the very best means of following the example of Jesus and His Mother. First, however, we must form an idea of what prayer really is. Dom Bélorgey sums up its essentials in an excellent definition when he writes: "Prayer is an elevation of the soul to God, to converse intimately with Him, with the two-fold aim of glorifying Him and finding in Him our true happiness." It is important to note that prayer thus defined is a most excellent way of fulfilling perfectly the purpose for which God has created us. This purpose is His own glory and our happiness. It is too often forgotten that the first and primary duty of the Christian is to God. Modern humanitarianism concentrates on the service of our fellow men and values religious observance chiefly in so far as it contributes to this service. This is by no means in accord with God's precept; His first commandment demands our

recognition and satisfaction of *His* claims upon us our primary duty, and what He afterwards asks us to do for our neighbour is asked for and is to be done for the sake of God.

This doctrine will help us to avoid the very serious and very common error of not recognising the value of a life of prayer which is directed solely to the glory of God. There are too few Christians who recognise the high value of a life of ordinary, unimportant labour lived by one who is continually united to God by prayer and whose actions are the result of submission to and acceptance of the will of God and His claims upon our complete devotion. There is a second error which is also quite common. One can distinguish four ends of prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and impétration. Too often we attach the most importance to the last one of these, and too often, also, we are more concerned with the impétration in connection with temporal benefits rather than with our spiritual needs. A less self centred outlook which would tend to make God the principle and purpose of our life would restore the true perspective, by making the glory of God our primary concern, and so modifying our secondary concern with our own self, that even in asking things for ourselves, we would ask them rather for His sake and for His service than for our own.

Mental prayer is the way *par excellence* to produce this restoration. But since prayer cannot be divorced from the rest of our life, and depends so much on our dispositions, there are certain preparations for it which must not be overlooked. Our Lord Himself warned us of the necessity for self denial, so that a certain degree of mortification is necessary by which we regulate the effects of original sin on our lives, and restrain our unruly passions and appetites. Fraternal charity is of the utmost importance as Our Lord indicates when He insists that before offering our gifts at the altar, we first go to be reconciled with those

who have something against us. Acceptance of God's will as the rule of our lives and abandonment to His Paternal care is of no lesser importance. Self-love, self-will and self-indulgence are enemies of a life of prayer. Yet the need for mortification need not discourage us, for Our Lord Himself insists that His yoke is sweet and His burden light, (cf. Matt. XI, 29.) In fact the three points just mentioned are so closely dependent upon humility that we might sum up all the preparation necessary for prayer by quoting Our Lord's own words: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." (Matt. II, 29.) We need not be afraid of such a Master, nor need we hesitate to accept His invitation. This invitation He has repeated in most tender words: "Behold I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear my word, and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." (Apoc. III, 20). This text above is sufficient answer to anyone who may feel that a life of prayer is not for the ordinary Christian. Our Lord's invitation is quite general: "If *any* man ----- and it is no less tender, for supper is the most intimate of meals, and the repetition—"I with him and he with Me"—emphasizes the intimacy which Our Lord seeks and offers to each of us.

He does, however, require us to "open the door." One important way of doing this is by regular spiritual reading. Among such reading the Bible, especially the Gospels, takes first place, but each one must find congenial literature suitable to his own particular needs and circumstances. Spiritual reading should be performed in a spirit of faith and recollection, putting oneself in the divine presence and listening attentively for the divine voice, which will in its own hidden way, speak to the soul who is truly seeking God. However, these points are so well treated in so many other places, that there is no need to do more

than to refer summarily to them here. It is with prayer itself that we are here concerned.

The treatment of prayer in the pages of this book has a special significance, for it is the fruit of a long and rich experience of souls. The author had been an army officer, and then entered the Cistercian Abbey at Chimay, in Belgium. . . .There he acted as Master of Novices and had the duty of forming his subjects to a life of prayer. Later on, his appointment as Auxiliary Abbot of Citeaux, gave him a new field of activity. Citeaux is the mother house of the whole order. The Abbot of Citeaux is the Abbot General of the Cistercian order, and resides in Rome: he has, therefore, to appoint an auxiliary abbot to govern the community at Citeaux. The choice of Dom Godefroid Bclorgey for that position is ample testimony to his competence. He writes, therefore, as one who has been in contact with souls whom he has led from the very beginning right up to the heights of prayer.

It may perhaps surprise some readers that a book written by such a man—a Cistercian Abbot concerned with Cistercian monks—should be offered to the general public, and even recommended—as I earnestly and heartily do recommend it—to the laity. At first sight nothing seems so remote from the life of the laity in the modern world than the Cistercian manner of the observance of the Rule of St. Benedict. Yet Benedictine spirituality, and especially the Cistercian variety—has a special significance for the laity of today. It is true that the primary work appointed for the community as such by St. Benedict is the celebration of the divine office, but each member of the community is expected to share in the labour necessary for the support of the community; and even during the time of labour, he is expected to live a life of prayer. In fact the Cistercian monk has no special place for his private prayer. Wherever he is working, there also should be he praying. A spirituality which aims at developing such a life of prayer has great

significance for those who would lead a life of prayer in the world.

The foundation of Benedictine spirituality is reverence for God leading to a continual memory of His presence and His rights, a profound humility which gladly recognizes and accepts the creature's complete dependence on his creator, and a loving co-operation with all that God's will enjoins, aiming at the purpose intended by God—that we be one with Him in Christ.

This union is, of course, greatly promoted by the effect of spiritual reading in conforming our mind to the mind of Christ. But it is on prayer in the wide sense of the word that we must rely for our most important effort to develop this union. We have to learn Christ's point of view and to leave our own, so that we conform to His mind and dispositions. The Sacraments, of course, are of capital importance in this work, but the great part to be played by our faith must never be overlooked. And it is clear that it is especially in prayer—which is essentially an exercise of faith—that we impregnate ourselves with the mind and dispositions of Christ. The gradual adjustment of our view to that of Christ, the gradual taking over of His way of seeing things, the gradual adoption of His way of doing things, the gradual development of our participation in His filial love and service of the Father; all that is the work of prayer. The perfect prayer is the prayer which He has taught us, and it is summed up in willing that all be done on earth as it is in heaven, according to His will. This perfect espousal of the will of God is the end and perfection of all prayer.

It would be an impertinence for me to comment, even by way of praise, on the content of the pages which follow. The attitude, however, of the reader is more within my province. I have already warned him (or her) not to be deterred by the obvious Cistercian background from applying the doctrine contained in these pages to his or

her own personal needs. In particular I would draw attention to the elasticity and adaptability of the presentation of the earlier stages of discursive prayer, and also I would point out that there are few other sources where one can find so practical and so complete a treatment of the problems of the soul who is confronted with the prayer of simplicity. Many souls have gone astray owing to the lack of some such instruction. The further stages of prayer are the subject of a second volume.

The American flavour of the English translation of the French original will add a note of freshness and modernity that is so desirable in spiritual writing. Again may we repeat, what follows is a description of what is possible for souls of ordinary grace. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: If *any man* shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him and I will sup with him and he with me."

PART 1.

THE

ORDINARY DEGREES OF PRAYER

Prayer is a divine colloquy arising from the intimate spiritual relationships which exist in faith and in charity between God and the soul. It depends upon God and upon the soul. The soul must use its intellect and will to know God, to love Him, and to converse supernaturally with Him. But it can only do this when, and in the same measure, it is moved and aided by divine grace. The gift of grace is God's part in the prayer. For true prayer, both God and the soul must play their parts in harmony and union. The two categories of prayer and their different degrees are distinguished according to the relative parts played by divine grace and by the human faculties. In all degrees of ordinary prayer, the soul acts with the help of ordinary grace. This ordinary grace is available always for every soul of good will, and becomes more intense in each degree of ordinary prayer. Ordinary prayer is divided into meditative (or discursive) prayer, affective prayer, and the prayer of simplicity, according to the relative parts played by the intellect and will.

I.—MEDITATIVE OR DISCURSIVE PRAYER

i.—Elements and Purpose.

Meditative Prayer is that which we make whçn God is giving His grace to our soul in an interior and hidden

manner, and we are making every effort to raise our mind to Him through considerations, and to raise our will by acts of love, desire and devout resolve.

Our faith needs strengthening. That is why considerations hold so important a place in the first degree. Discursive prayer, discourse, or more simply, meditation are other names that illustrate how arduous it is to search into truth, turning ideas and turning them repeatedly in their every aspect, until they penetrate our understanding and arouse these ardent acts of desire and resolution.

The will acts in real prayer. Without it our labour might be exclusively intellectual. Now after consideration we understand why something true and good attracts us, and why on the other hand, error, or evil is repugnant. Then our will makes affective acts in accord with our understanding; so that lovingly and with desire we seek whatever good has been proposed by the mind. Or if it is a question of evil, we hate it. As we should have reason to expect then, this condition of the will is actively fruitful, with its decisive and resolute seeking after what is good, its forsaking what is not good.

All in all, meditative prayer profoundly deepens our convictions. It fires our heart and subdues or strengthens the will as our moral progress requires. It has achieved its object if the grand truths of religion penetrate our lives to such an extent that we are living those very truths. But for this, study alone does not suffice.

Or we might say that meditation puts into practice the psychological principle so well presented by Eymieu in his *Gouvernement de soi-même:* 'Thought leads to action.' And although a pure thought does not often touch us, if it is embodied in some form that our senses can grasp, then we are powerfully inclined to do something about it. Such a thought becomes ours and we live by it. And

since we act according to our convictions, it is inevitable then that we come to live what we think, to live what we love. If so many Christians abandon the practice of their religion so easily, it is because they have no religious convictions.

To live in faith, or with faith, is not enough. *Justus ex fide vivit.*[1] The just man lives, says Saint Paul, by his faith; and not *cum fide* alone.

After this somewhat theoretical statement, we should like to review a number of the different ways of practising meditative prayer.

2.—Preparation.

It is essential to understand a threefold preparation for prayer, consisting in remote, proximate and immediate arrangements.

Remote preparation is indispensable, the most important of the three, and unhappily the one we usually lose sight of. Needless to say, this preparation is ever the same throughout all degrees of prayer. Who is more admirably disposed for prayer than the religious who strives habitually for purity of heart and detachment through mortification, for faculties disciplined by both outer and inner surrendering of judgment and will, who consecrates himself to God in a totally generous fraternal love, who is humble through practising the presence of God, and furthermore desires to learn to know God and the things of God by application to sacred study—yet who, amidst all, is recollected and interiorly silent so that he may safeguard what has been revealed in his heart. . . .

We do not discuss the sacramental life in this book, except to say that frequent partaking of the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Penance is the living wellspring of prayer. We presuppose this, of course.

[1] Romans, I, 17; Cf. Mannion, *Le Christ idéal du moine,* 131-132.

According to Tanquerey,[1] the *proximate preparation* comprises three elements: first, perusal of some spiritual author, or listening to a subject for meditation before we retire; next, having reflected on the subject until asleep, we return to it the first thing in the morning (let us concentrate, encouraging our heart's response); so that when we enter the meditation it will be with a confident, humble ardour, desiring to glorify God more and more. Truly, a soul that has done all this is ready for converse with God; at the beginning of meditation it is almost in His presence. Still it must intensify its dispositions.

Immediate preparation for prayer consists in putting ourself in the *presence of God.* This is the first element in the meditation proper, and is absolutely important. For prayer is conversation; and the two who talk, God and the soul, must realise each other's presence. God is always present; though instead of being here with Him our heart is usually wandering in thought or imagination somewhere off among creatures. The presence of God means being recollected. It means withdrawal of our faculties from created things, allowing every care and reverie, all that is not God, to fall away. This establishes the favourable atmosphere, the necessary stillness that corresponds closely to what Saint Benedict desires in chapter XX of his Rule.

He says that if we are respectful and modest in the presence of a powerful person from whom we want a favour, then how much more so should we be when we are with Our Lord in prayer. As for public prayer, *maxime credamus,*[2] let us emphasize our belief in the presence of God. In this way we shall come to realise that we are actually speaking with someone. But *quanto magis?*

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* N. 689.
1 Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. XIX.
s Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. XX.

'how much more'! For now we are with no creature, however powerful, but with the Creator Himself. At this time our attentive reverence cannot but be transformed into adoration. Being in the presence of God in this manner prepares us for worthy prayer: humbly—we see our nothingness in the face of the allness of God—and confidently, knowing that the Creator is our Father as well. Everything goes smoothly after this.

Once in the presence of God, we tell Him our needs. We begin by adoring Him, and end by begging for His light so that we may see into truth, and for His grace so that we may abide with Him, under His sight.

3.—The Core of Meditative Prayer.

Four stages are fundamental and are bound to be present in this prayer.

—First, *considerationi* 'about God, and our relationship with Him; they nourish and fortify our convictions of the Christian virtues'.[1] We could consider 'how necessary and important it is' to avoid some fault or acquire a certain virtue; or we might 'entreat Him fervently for this virtue, praying for the kind of grace that would maintain the untiring co-operation of our will'.[2]

—Then *self-examination* on this point, 'ascertaining both our present failings and the way ahead.' This examination kindles ardent *affective acts.* We are sorry for the past, 'we beg for guidance along the way ahead, and prayerfully seek a grace-full progress in the virtue of our desire'.[3] Finally we make a practical and enduring *resolution* to leave the fault or love the virtue upon which we have meditated'[4]

[1] Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 664.
[2] Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 690.
[3] Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 690.
[4] Tanquerey. *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 690.

4.—Conclusion and Continuing Effects.

'Having given thanks to God for all His blessings,'[1] we end the meditation in a humble, confident prayer for the grace to keep our resolution.

And now is the time for a *spiritual bouquet.* No one can tell us about it better than Saint Francis of Sales. 'After we have finished, we ought to gather a little bouquet of devotion. And this is what I mean. Anyone who has been strolling in a sweetly-scented garden does not like to leave it without taking away four or five flowers, so that they may be at hand throughout the day; thus it is when our mind has savoured of some mystery during meditation, we ought to select two or three points that are attractive and pertinent, to which we may return often, mindful of their spiritual sweetness.'[2]

Briefly, the spiritual bouquet and being mindful of God are one inseparable practice, the importance of which both Saints, Benedict and Francis of Sales attest for us. Lasting, real progress in our soul can be the only fruit of a practice that seeks to prolong our prayer all the day, confirming and regenerating in us the spirit we had originally when we came out of meditation. And assuredly it is our strength as our faults lessen, as we become better, and at last as we are established in the kingdom with Jesus, saying, 'I live for my Father. I am always attentive to Him, always doing with love His will and His good pleasure.'

5.—A Concrete Example of Meditation.

As proximate preparation last night, I read again Mgr. Gay's pages on the eternal love of God.[3] Here is this morning's meditation.

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 691,
2 Saint Francis of Sales, *Introduction à la vie dévoté,* p. II, ch. VII.
3 Gay, *Vie et vertus chrétiennes,* T. II, 234-239, 254-258, (de la charité envers Dieu).

Putting Myself in the Presence of God.

Kneeling, I gaze at the Tabernacle, or upon a crucifix. I give myself completely to God, letting every image or thought fall away out of my mind, returning and returning to Him. 'My God, You are here! And I am here with You for a little while, trying to learn to love You. Without You I am helpless, and should only offend You. So help me, God. Oh my God, show me how. . . .'

I rest here like this, now and then closing my eyes and quietly praying for love. A gradual, increasing silence comes, giving peace to my soul. Now not only in desire, but in the fulness of reality, I am with Him, under the gaze of God. And even if it meant spending most of my time just desiring God, *only in His presence,* not before, should I attempt a consideration.

Considerations.

Dare I think it? Yet it is true, God loves me with an everlasting love. Before the existence of Angels, when God was alone in perfect happiness, needing nothing, He knew me and loved me, though I did not even exist. God knew every creature that He was going to bring into existence, as it was abiding perfectly in His Word. Seeing Himself, God saw me. And loving, in the Spirit, His Word, He would love me. This is the Love that never began and can know no end; the everlasting Love that loves me!

And in this life too, God declares His especial love for me. He saw to it that I was born into a profoundly Christian family; and on the day of my Baptism He came and made His abode within me; and then, still in my childhood He invited me to receive Him in His Holy Eucharist. Ohl how many many times since then has He given Himself to me! Ceaselessly He drew me. And

in ways I shall not ever know He prepared my consecration. What can be said of this unforgettable, heavenly kindness that brought me to a monastery? Yet even beyond the bounty of graces that I am aware of, what of all the saving, silent ones which have been ever present, ever upholding me!

Self-Examination.

And how have I responded to Your eternally seeking love? Oh my God, You have had to raise me time and time again from carelessness, from failings that were marked, often grave. And still cold-hearted, I slight You, ignoring this love of Yours.

Affective Acts.

Oh God, can You forgive what has been happening! I know now what ingratitude is; now I see my pride rearing and entwining me in self-love. Oh my God, teach me sorrow', teach me to repent. But how'? How can I respond to Your ever-lasting love? Impossible! My God, I am unable. And yet You beseech, You long for this poor creature in Yrour infinite mercy. My good God, Your love never ceases.

Nowr I know how to undo the past. You give me confidence in the midst of all my failings. In contrition and repentance then, that old lovelessness is lost my God, lost in the tears of my heart. Oh God! burn sorrow into this heart, that sorrowing compunction so dear to Your holy Benedict, Your Saint. I long to suffer, to atone, and through it to love You more, my God. I implore Your mercy, Your grace, Your help!

Resolutions.

From this very moment I resolve to remain with You always. At the beginning and in the midst of any work, I

shall be ever sensitive to You, desirous only to keep us together, in Your everlasting love.

Conclusion.

Thank You my God, for Your light, for having touched a little this hardness in my breast. How well You know how very little I can do. Without Your help my weaknesses overwhelm me. Be my strength, bless my resolution. Oh Mary, Virgin Most Holy, you are the way to this everlasting love of God.

Spiritual Bouquet.

Ipse prior dilexil nos! Oh yes, my God, You loved me first I'1

1 Cf. I, John, IV, 19.

IL—CONSOLATION AND ARIDITY.

i.—Sources of Difficulty in Meditation.

After what we have said, meditation would seem reasonably simple and worthwhile. But in practice it is sometimes difficult; and often we cannot see improvement. Why should this be so ? Now difficulty comes either from God or from ourself. And God is not usually the source.

At the end of prayer then, or during the particular examen, we must probe back into our preparation; after which we should consider carefully each element in the meditation itself. Have I moderated my remote preparation at all, by failings in self-denial or prayer ? Have I carried out my duties in a well-ordered way ? We shall remark often, as we do now, that most of our difficulty is caused by negligence in mortification, obedience, fraternal love or by spending our prayer and study time wastefully. Have I made my proximate preparation as well as possible? Am I immediately prepared for meditation by being in the presence of God, imploring His graces? Are my considerations profoundly searching and productive ? After all, they must arouse my heart and steel the will to act. We are never to forget that the purpose of consideration is to permit us to grasp, really, a pure thought. Only then can we make the kind of affective acts that are the principle of prayer.

'Until this point is reached, we have no meditation but a mental exercise. It is with the will that a soul makes the gift of itself, and finds union with God; short of this

it is only a spectator. There is an abyss between seeing and doing. Seeing good, the power of darkness hates it. Having recognised good, our heart is stirred to follow. And yet our love is never bound; we can be hostile, resisting evidence, delaying the final self-surrender'.1

'The more insight we are given, the more is our love illumined in the light of understanding; and our heart rejoices in its treasure. Then, the will aroused, we can moderate the working of our mind, so that it has but to nourish our heart, maintaining the pitch of love already achieved there. And as long as a consideration lasts, let us use it, interspersing frequent self-examinations; only aridity should make us leave it and take up another'.2

And so prayer is more a matter of the heart than of the head.

A badly chosen subject is little aid to prayer. A well chosen one is supple, harmonising with our spiritual tone; it is lovingly productive. The subjects contained in Saint Benedict's first degree of humility are ideal meditation for a beginner: God and His perfection, man compared with God, our duties, Heaven, Hell, Sin. . . , And after a short while we can engage in rich scriptural reflection on Our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

These few paragraphs have outlined the usual human failings in prayer. But if we are sincerely unaware of any negligence, can we question God ? Are we to doubt Him ?

Never ! God always has His plan, though it may not at all times resemble ours. Sometimes we can see Him helping us; at other times He is too hidden. There are certain aspects of consolation and aridity, or dryness, that apply to meditation alone; however our remarks will extend generally.

1 Rihet, *L'ascitique chrétienne,* ch. XXIX, 307, (7th ed.)
1 Ribet, *L'ascétique chrétienne,* ch. XXIX, 309-310, (7th ed.).

2.—Consolation.

The feeling of consolation is tender, a spiritual joy suffusing our senses.[1] To know it we must experience it. 'Heart-filled with the Lord, we rejoice and hasten to Him. In all His delight He is in us, and we are attended, drawn, enfolded and finally lost in His love'.[2]

God's only desire is for our soul to know His presence, and to be radiant with it. So He will take us to Him, teaching us to understand what is supernatural, enlightening our intelligence, unfolding mysteries and raising our will above ourself to Him alone. The wearying vanities of the world cannot last in the presence of this consolation from above; it is living and marvellous beyond anything we should ever merit. Even as certain pleasure is compatible with our duties, God will not withhold it from our prayer. We may rejoice in this gift as long as it helps us to love its Giver, God.

And we shall not err. 'Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way?'[3] God knows how helpful His consolation is; Saint Bernard mentions his need of it. And the Church prays that we may be consoled in the joy of the Holy Spirit. This is a token then, of the divine graciousness. Let us take it gratefully, that it may take us to the Father, Who has an especial love for each one of us. What can we give God in return? Greater appreciation and generosity. Thus consoled, we are patient in our daily trials, capable of firm and fitting resolutions, spiritually stronger, lovers of prayer; and faith in God's goodness fills us increasingly. Yet this is hardly a beginning of His gift.

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 921.
* Ribet, *L'ascétique chrétienne,* ch. XXIV, 250.
• Luke, XXIV, 32.

Now it is possible to feel or imagine strikingly similar consolations that are the devil's, or that originate in our human tendency to twist and overstrain the consolation of the Lord. And so we must mistrust any feelings that bind us to external things, make us proud or turn us from our allotted duty. If they become strong, it is time to open ourself in all simplicity to our director. For God moves in peace and silence.

Let divine consolation make us cautious. There is a spiritual greed that fastens us more 'to the consolation of God than to the God of consolation.'[1] Sometimes when this consoling vanishes, so does the life of prayer! For the guise of our pride is varied; it can be condescending, egotistical or self-assertive. And we often assume complacency at the moment when God yearns for us to redouble our effort.

God's consolation is also our support in another, drier time; it steadies us, so that when the purifying trial of interior suffering comes, we shall not falter in ascending to our Love.

3.— Aridity.

Aridity is 'absence of the sensible and spiritual consolations that once made prayer and the practice of virtue easy'.[2]

God is either recalling us to order, or trying us, in His mercy; it is 'dryness through fault' or 'dryness without fault.' Now we say again that if self-examination reveals a particular failing, or some spirit of relaxation, neglect in little things, immortification, waste or deliberate day-dreaming in our remote preparation, then we need look no further. We are at fault. This is God's warning.

[1] Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 923.
[2] Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 925.

How very humble and grateful we should be for it. We beg His pardon and set out again, knowing we have no right to be consoled, yet somehow confident and happy in a deeper knowledge that His gifts, well-used, will lead us directly to Him.

However we may not find any distinct fault even after careful and unagitated examination. In the fourth degree of humility, Saint Benedict speaks of a detachment not only from created things, but also from consolation in prayer. In this manner God purifies and confirms the virtue of 'His faithful servant*.

Again give thanks to God ! And leaving the difficulties as they are, unexaggerated, let us dwell patiently in His gift. Can anything be more purifying than this arid, creatureless seeking after God ? Our duty is to endure, continuing undaunted in our customary spiritual exercises, letting our nature lament as it will. And fast in our heart is Saint Teresa's warning that the gravest danger she ever ran in her life was to give up prayer. If the aridity lasts it is well to seek the help of our director and tell him all. He will give us specific direction, teaching us how to practise Saint Benedict's golden rule: 'Secure the soul in silence, love patience, and endure, neither tiring nor surrendering'.1

Aridity expresses itself in many ways and degrees, although it is divided generally into two sorts. A calm, arid period does not impede prayer. But troubled aridity is a time of confusion and temptation. It is a painful warfare of distraction in which we try to prav.

4.—Distractions.

'Distractions are unwanted thoughts that take us out of prayer'.2 True, we turn to some of them ourselves,

1 Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. VII, (quatrième degré d'humilité).
* Ribet, *L'ascitique chrétienne,* ch. XXII, 226.

though more often they surge spontaneously through our mind. But once aware of a distraction we are responsible. Willingly we may take it or leave it. And even leaving it, our innocence is not always perfect; there can be a deeper wilfulness, a subtle guilt *in causa:* for who among us does not know well our natural tendency to be idle, unrecollected and out of union with God ? Our inconstant mind is seldom free enough to be fixed in prayer upon a single object; and harrying figures of thought make pieces of our concentration.

It is naive to think that we can be affected only in a limited manner. Some characters are beset, almost possessed by external things. Poorly planned studies, worrying, yielding to distraction in our daily tasks, all are sources of difficulty in prayer; and any sickness, any general or specific depression serves to increase our inconstancy of mind. Then too, our heart is dangerous, beguiling us back to things we loved; and its feeling, impulses, like toys of the devil, win us away from God. We can say yes or no to such distraction. Our answer is our reward. But even if it should be yes, we can still will it away and return to Him.

Yet above all this, it is possible to rest preserved, habitually recollected in the presence of God. In prayer, a simple glance to Him can carry our mind and heart over beyond the distraction, back to God again; we are humbled of course, yet unperturbed.

We cannot always re-enter into His presence like this. For we cannot always escape some kind of torment or withering dryness. But using no impatience and no force, we have got to try to let the distractions fall away. Again and again returning to God, we seek Him, searching in the very deep of our being. And often all this will seem sterile. But God is not away; such is our confidence.

He is here as He desires, doing great things within us. And we are never-failing in our faith!

III.—ALTERNATIVES.

It is a matter of experience that sometimes, often throughout a whole prayer period, we are not able to pray as we customarily do; in fact any kind of prayer may seem impossible. Some spiritual people in the world can pray only during the early hours; and is there a cloister that is wholly free from this human problem?

Yet we know that God wants each of us to become a soul of prayer. And so we have proper alternatives at our disposal. But by which of them can we pray best and be with God? By trial we shall discover the ones that succeed. They will give glory to God and impart peace to us.

Let us remember though, that good as they are, these are sixteen *alternatives*. And such alternate activity might seem preferable if we did not realise that pure prayer is most God-like and permits Him the maximum action within us. Fancy or whimsical attraction toward what is new, perhaps facile, is no reason to alternate. But if we should find it impossible to apply ourself to the whole supernatural life, even to considerations and acts of love, we can still pray. No matter how unrecollected we are, how high or low our normal state of prayer, how very dry we may be, there is a fitting alternative; and it can be refined as much as we wish. In spite of anything, then, we can pray.

Dom Lehody remarks that alternatives 'embrace all the elements of meditation; and that their considerations, affective acts, desires and resolutions have the customary effects in us. But they differ from meditative prayer in that their considerations work in freely supple and attractive

ways upon our mind. Often we must be very imaginative with them'.[1]

Such diversity argues that it is always possible to pray—if we wish.

i.—Meditative-Reading.

Ordinarily it is a preparation for prayer, but in accord with the principles just stated, meditative-reading can serve as a supplement. In this case, reading is far more than an aid for meditation. We think of Saint Teresa's years in which she could not pray without it. Boldly opening our book often breaks the distraction. When it does, we close the book and turn to God. We refer particularly to that kind of book in which the considerations are developed by the author. Such reading-meditation is well approved, and is a thorough, safe guide for our understanding.

If we want to realise better the holy Benedict's spirit, every reading ought to be meditation; for *lectio* and *oratio,* reading and prayer, are really one in the mind of the Saint. The choice of book is important; although we shall come quickly to know which authors touch our mind and heart. And we do not look at a word until we are in the presence of God, asking for the grace to understand Him. For the fruit of our reading is dependent upon a deeply rooted realisation that it is God Who talks to us by means of the book.

We read slowly to savour the depth in each phrase, seeking immersion in it, passing on only when the flow of thought is over. The state we are in governs the length of our reflections and acts of love. 'It is important for this exercise to be seasoned with prayer and love, so that it will enlighten our mind and inflame our will'.[2]

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 172.
2 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 185,

2.—Meditation on Vocal Prayer.

This kind of prayer is in set form, often memorised. A slow recitation affords us time enough to dwell upon each w'ord. 'Both vocal and mental, it is the readily rewarding prayer taught by Saint Ignatius; Saint Teresa extols it and adds a host of suggestions'.[1]

But let us choose our prayers wisely, often returning to those given us by God Himself, the *Pater* and the *Ave Maria*. How beautiful is Saint Teresa's treatment of the *Pater* in *Le Chemin de la Perfection*. And in his *Conferences,* Cassian describes how well the Fathers loved their Lord's Prayer. The Church's prayers, including antiphons and hymns, are ours, as are those of her saints and holy people. We have in mind those of Saint Alphonsus Liguori and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Their content should be especially meaningful to us, for we are dealing with the veritable presence of Love, the presence of God. We gently recite the prayer until some thought attracts and claims our heart. Then like a bee taking honey, we take all from the flower of our devotion.[2] The words of the prayer will both fix our attention and imbue our acts of love with grace.

The precise, concrete ideas in vocal prayer are perfect weapons against distractions and temptations. They are conducive to what Georges Goyau has called 'the perfect prayer—words ending in the silence of the thought of God; words that uphold the soul's patient movement to what I call the *state of prayer,* wherein the *act of prayer* begins'.[3]

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 181.
* Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 183-184.
• *Revue Catholique des idées et des faits,* March 24, 1922, (Article by Georges Goyau),

3.—The Psalms.

The Psalms are distinct among all forms of composed prayer. For many centuries the Fathers of the Desert and of the Benedictine and Cistercian Orders memorised the psalter, using it as nourishment for personal prayer, quite apart from its use in the Divine Office. Our own Fathers used to go into the cloister after Matins to learn psalms and 'ruminate' on them; many monks used to say them continually, like the venerable cellarer who used to recite two psalters a day. These men spoke to God always. They were as familiar with psalms as we are with the Rosary.

But psalms can help our prayer. They express and clarify each of the movements experienced in our soul's relationship with God. In them, the Holy Spirit prepares us for the presence of our Father. We ask of God the things we need. Now have we ever dreamed of putting Him under obligation, as it were, by thanking Him in advance for His gifts? Many of the psalms show us how to do this. And versicles from the psalms make souls of prayer in Saint Benedict's own tradition. They raise us wonderfully to God. And the *Miserere,* for example, or a canticle like the *Magnificat,* each is in sublimest harmony with our soul, capable of reviving it at once in the spirit of the living God.

4.—The Rosary.

Great numbers of active people learn to pray well in the school of the Rosary; and many contemplatives have found no finer alternative. The Rosary is not a simple chant of *Ares* for a favour. Its operation is unique: our lips recite while our mind and heart are involved in sacred mystery; we are in the midst of the great events in the life of Jesus, and partaking of their special graces.

Mary herself gives us her Son. She lived alone with Him, and intensely, in Him. Now it is her delight to reveal the hidden things of that love to us. And moved by prayer, she intercedes in our behalf before her Son and God, Whom we adore.

When the utterance of our *Aves* is really prayer, we find the priceless pearl that is hidden from so many. There is a classical method, and we trust that our exposition of it does not prove a cloud of misunderstanding to anyone.[1] But in general, one's approach to the mysteries and way of recitation are matters of personal form.

Historically considered, the mysteries are concise frames within which the eyes of our memory and imagination may be focussed upon Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. As we learn to see God, our desire for Him increases. And we must never forget that the heart of Jesus and Mary is with us at this moment. They lived for us the mysteries of love once; they are living them eternally in us and for us, now. Thus is the truth of both past and present framed in our Rosary.

And within each frame there are many viewing points. From one we may observe the change and development of meaning in certain words as our prayer covers the fifteen mysteries. For example, *gratia plena:* in Mary's course from the Annunciation through Calvary to the Assumption, her very fulness of grace is filled more and more until it is infinite ! And when such an association as this becomes automatic, so that certain scenes and statements arouse corresponding love and faith, distractions cannot last. The atmosphere of prayer comes easily to us then. These phrases are like springboards. And if graced actually, through the wish of Our Lady, we may

1 We are influenced by the Conference given by Dominican Father Rettenbach to his students of Saulchoir-Etiolles, when they were visiting Citeaux.

be granted a simple, dwelling gaze into a mystery. Often, when this grace begins to pass away, and our attention with it, a phrase like this restores all aright. And the more we are allowed to penetrate the mysteries, even outside the frame of the Rosary, the more effortless and clear is our vision of God.

Now from another point of view, we may align ourself with a general theme. The words of the *Ave Maria* begin in praise and end by petitioning our holy Mother; wc can do the same. Or we may be borne by grief, adoration, pangs of faith and love to His Mother, and so to Him.

Thirdly, we may hold in view the person addressed by the prayer; sometimes uniting Our Lord and Lady in a single contemplation. But only she can take us into this territory of the Heart, by way of her own heart. And so, close to our Mother, membered in the Body of her Son, we live with them in their loving mysteries.

These views show the flexibility of this alternate form of prayer. The Rosary lets us look at God and love Him, until we are with Him.

5.—The Way of the Cross.

In principle like beads, the stations unfold the fourteen stages in the Passion of our Saviour. Their variety is ideal for those who cannot meditate continuously. The Way of the Cross is for us a way of sorrow, then love. But the love born of this sorrow will not permit us to endanger contemplation by any compliance with distraction. Some religious have been known to spend every interval in the Way of the Cross.

The stations can be made in prayer, silence or written meditation. And there is an unusual keenness in the way evangelical texts have been employed in some of the modern commentaries. Good representations, too, are

capable of raising us to God. Failing them, a phrase of Scripture under a cross can be very suggestive. We may try to reconstruct the actual scenes, or pray for the grace that is in each of the sufferings of our Master. Or united to His Mother, we may ascend Calvary. At each station we can adore, commiserate, and realise in some measure, our eternal gratefulness. As we are praying, grace flows to us from the Hands of Jesus in Heaven. The suffering in His Passion makes our heart sensitive to His love, to the true meaning of our sins; it is the substance of our increasing generosity.

6.—Written Meditation.

Writing the meditation quells a distracted, rebellious mind; although hard to begin, it can always be done, and it does good. When both body and mind are concentrated, the will too, is channelled. Letters may be written to our Lord, or to the Blessed Virgin; or after reading a Gospel page, we can close the book and re-write it as it occurs to us. All this should be done in such a way that our love may express itself most freely.

These, and especially the following four alternatives, replace our normal prayer only when they re-unite us to God; otherwise they amount to a devious and pious-appearing distraction. But generous, loving souls use them 'to seek God alone.'

7.—Representations and Works of Art.

Some artists pray as they create, others cannot. Perhaps as compensation then, it is sometimes left to us to enter easily into prayer when we contemplate beautiful architecture, sculpture or canvas. A favourite crucifix, or a statue often visited and familiar, is a sample of the presence of Jesus and Mary. A glance often establishes an

atmosphere of prayer and holy intimacy, no matter what we are doing. And if we are spiritually aware during this, we shall soon enjoy the spirit of God.

8.—A Meditative Walk.

This is a matter of praying on a particular subject, and praying on it while we walk. There are times when even a church or chapel can seem distractive, when our lower faculties and senses restively prevent union with God. But the varieties of nature can engage these errant senses, freeing higher faculties for meditation. When grownups wish to be serious, unruly children are put out to play.

9.—A Contemplative Walk.

An unplanned walk can raise us to God with quiet spontaneity. All we see or hear praises the power, the wisdom and the provident bounty of our Father. A grass-blade or a daisy, the music of a nightingale, a swallow in the air, and the setting, rising sun are all things beautiful to know.

10.—Singing.

There are hymns and canticles to be sung. In them is God's own peace and joy. But *Cantantes et psallentes in cordibus vestris Domino*[1] Saint Paul would have us sing them in our heart, as disturbing others less!

ii.—Spiritual Conversation.

This was a common practice among the Desert Fathers; young hermits loved to visit the ancients. Saint Benedict advises caution, however; and the Fathers of Citeaux have prohibited talk among the brethren. Still, conversation

1 Ephesians, V, 19.

with our Abbot or director is a grace soothing much trouble, temptation and aridity. Saint Benedict's fifth degree of humility horrifies the devil. It extols an open, humble heart. For the quickest way to talk to God is to talk about God.

But above all, consider the grace in finding another soul who seeks God as we seek Him. In a special way, He is between us. Consider the providential planning of our Father Who is in Heaven, Who sees to it that His children meet and reveal His light one to another upon the earth.

12.— Examination of Conscience by Meditation.

This examen is short, lasting perhaps fifteen minutes. It contains acts of love, desire and resolution. In it, the very mentioning of a difficulty to Our Lord and Lady gives us the strength we need. We may discuss our day with God, frankly confessing our inattentiveness and asking His pardon. We resolve once more to let Him lead us to virtue; for God would ever strengthen and secure His grace in us.

Let our conversation be simple. Oh my Lord, I promised to do this, and I did not do it. I felt Your grace's gentle pull, but where was my generosity? Again, failure. Please forgive it! I offer You my weakness, begging Your help.' Such a prayer, lengthened a little, is powerful enough to return us to His presence.

13.— The Will of God.

Living in the presence of God is inseparable from desiring to accomplish His will perfectly. In doing what God wants us to do, we love Him; doing what He would like us to do perfects this love. So we seek, find, and

finally knowing God's will, do it; *ac si divinitus imperetur,*[1] obedient as if to God Himself. For where our superiors are, there He is. They are His own ministers, an Abbot is Christ's vicar. Fulfilling their least desires, then, is knowing really the will of God, And everything reveals God: our life, experiences, our trials of soul and body.

Incapacity in prayer is an offering-we can make to our good God. Love is the sincerity in our sacrifice; it guides us through everything to Him alone. 'Saying *it is God's will,* says all,' was what Saint Francis of Sales so often repeated to Saint Jane of Chantal. Nothing else is necessary when we desire this state of soul where God is.

14.—Love for One Another.

Such mutual love springs spontaneously out of prayer. It disposes us for prayer, too, and even replaces it in a limited way. For when we concentrate upon seeing Christ and serving Him as He appears in each of those about us, we forget our self. Self-surrender is proof of love. This is Christ's love. It demands tact, feeling and above all else, greatness of Faith. 'Christ is asking me to smile to Him.' 'Look, someone is coming. It is the Lord.' T do not judge Jesus, I shall not judge my neighbour.' There are no distractions, really. What can separate us from God when we see Him everywhere ?

15.—God in the Midst of Everything.

Amidst family life a mother achieved intimate union with God, and her soul found His presence in all things. She had no servant, many children, little time for reading and prayer, but 'God was in the midst of everything.' Despite overwork and seeming helplessness, this little,

1 Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. V.

practical way brought the very speech of Jesus and Mary into her heart.

Laurence of the Resurrection, a kitchen brother, found this way, too. His generous candour makes *La pratique de la présence de Dieu* so meaningful. He said that our attempts to keep ourselves in the presence of God are much too complicated; that it is quicker and more direct to perform each action for love of Him, *losing no opportunity in our state of life* to prove this love; and that whenever our heart is talking with God, we possess the secret of being in His holy presence.[1]

16.—Returning to God.

Our interior life demands a continual returning to God. By this practice we are prayerful before we pray; our prayer itself is more complete and lasting; it even affirms the graces of meditation. When Saint Francis of Sales told Saint Jane, 'I could not pray this morning, but I did the next best thing,'[2] he was referring to this. Returning to God conforms anew our will with His. Its effect is like that of a short examination of conscience; for it is re-contact, we are with Him again, striving to intensify our intimacy. Our state of soul indicates whether we should return to God by formal examen, or a simple flight of heart, spiritual communion, a gaze, or with a glance. We can make this return anywhere at anytime. And no matter what we are doing, or for how long, we can always be in the presence of God. This practice of returning to God is fundamental to every kind of prayer; and the last three alternatives are particular and deliberate means whereby we may return to Him.

[1] Lament, de la Résurrection, convers carme déchaussée, *Pratique de la présence de Dieu,* 92, (new ed. Desclée).

[*] Hamon, curé de Saint-Sulpice, *Vie de Saint François de Sales,* 330, (Paris, 1883).

This has been an outline of the diverse ways open to anyone who wishes to become a soul of prayer, living an interior life. For now we know it is possible to dwell in the Lord and to pray always. The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent alone take it. If we 'try' merely, or just 'do what we can,' or 'hope' to do better, Heaven will never be ours. But a strong and true intention captures the graces we need.

Alternative prayer is pliant; experience will teach us which to use and when we are to use it. Very soon we shall be passing from one form to another guided by necessity and our director's counsel. And we must maintain an inviolable desire to immerse ourself again in pure, limpid prayer, the moment God allows it.

Is church the best place to pray? Whenever possible, for the Sacred Humanity of Jesus radiates out upon us from the Tabernacle. Yet apart from church, if we wish to pray in some permissible place, let us not hesitate, knowing we are in the sight of God everywhere. And at times, mental prayer itself will not remain within rule, either. However we have Saint Benedict's excellent advice to begin by praying in short periods—a quarter of an hour more or less, three or four times a day—letting the Holy Spirit extend them through the interaction of grace and spiritual direction. But let us never forget, it is impossible to become a soul of prayer unless we pray much.

And although these exercises are indispensable, they are only means. Our end is a life of prayer, a realisation of the precept given to us by Jesus. We are to pray always, being responsive and generous, wholly given to God. And often it will require humility to turn to an alternative, but this is the desire of our heavenly Father Who sustains us.

IV,—AFFECTIVE PRAYER.

The few alternatives we have reviewed would show that prayer is possible always. To be exact, prayer is not only possible, but becomes increasingly simple and delightful as we advance. Father Faber remarks, 'When a Christian is so absorbed in God that his study is principally spiritual, his works holy, he often finds that meditation is no longer expedient. Then he must turn to what ascetical writers call *affective prayer'.*1 Having condensed their teaching, we hope our presentation is clear and understandable, for there are many souls capable of this prayer.

i.—Elements.

When the working of our mind is simplified, we may be ready for an affective form of mental prayer. 'Holy affections predominate. Eager to glorify God, our will expresses itself in a variety of acts of love for Him'.2

'At the beginning we need convictions, we must reason; and so we have little time for affective acts. But when these convictions have found root in our soul, recalling them occasionally is sufficient. Then we can spend a great amount of time in acts of love'.3 During this period of simplification, a certain spiritual concept appears outstanding to us; we are aware of grace; its power within us increases, and we realise finally that our soul is being taken towards a divine Person.

1 Faber, *Progrès de l'âme,* ch. XV.
2 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 976.
3 Tanquerey, *Precis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 976.

'Possessed by love of God, seeing virtue so beautiful, our soul soars in free and sacred flight up to the Author of all that is good, adoring, blessing Him, thankful in our love. Up to Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Saviour of our soul, Whom we imitate, obey, and Whom we love with the dearest love, for He is Friend and Brother to us. Up to the Holiest Virgin, with a Son's confident, boundless love,' love that is surpassingly tender and delicate.

Our heart can surge in other ways, too, for example in bewildered shame and humiliation as it beholds its own poverty; or yearning to be better, it prays, confident of the coming grace; and in glory to God, our zealous heart may cry Heavenward for the sake of souls, or in behalf of the Church'.1

In a regular period of prayer, then, affective acts arise out of one simple and compelling concept. Lesser figures of thought cluster about, but only to serve as nourishment for these ever renewed, though always new acts of love. 'With the mind in silence, our heart begins to speak'.2

2.— Advantages.

Assuredly, affective prayer can be prolonged much more easilythan meditation. Does not its very first movement put us in the presence of the One we love? Now in pure prayer we say one simple thing to God, but every circumstance of our day inspires a fresh act of this new kind of love-in-prayer. We can be like a child, continually talking, pouring out our heart to Jesus and Mary, about everything or about nothing. So our life is lost in God; and like Brother Laurence in his kitchen, we talk as we will with the divine Persons, and do everything in their midst. We discover that God is the One Who counts, and Whom

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 976.
2 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 187.

we can count upon, in life. What is the principal advantage of affective prayer? *A more intimate, uninterrupted union with God.*[1]

Nothing increases our love and understanding of God more than when He speaks in our heart. Saint Bonaventure said, 'The best way of knowing God is to experience the delight of His love; better than reason, this is a nobler, more excellent, more truly choice way to learn'.[2] 'Just as a tree is best judged by the savour of its fruit, so it is with divine attributes; we really appreciate how excellent they are when we experience the sweetness of God's love'.[3]

Saint Bernard, the 'mellifluous' doctor, who bequeathed this particular tone of love to the Cistercian Order, to the whole of mediaeval religion, and to our modern concept of meditation, wrote: *Frequentando gustari, gustando probari quam suavis est Dominus.*[4] Being with God, we partake of Him—and partaking, come to know how sweet He is. Affective prayer is a beginning of this love; henceforth our love and prayer progress together, to God. And when our heart is listening to the Word of God, we learn with ease. 'We practise the virtues more perfectly as the fire of our love mounts higher'.[5] And increasingly affective acts of love perfect this Godly love, just as virtue increases with repetition.

We may remark that *spiritual consolation* is often found in affective prayer. It is not sweeter or more rare than the joy in friendship, really; but since Jesus is our most sensitive and Self-giving Friend, His presence is heavenly joy: *esse cum Jesu dulcis paradisus.* Still, where such happiness exists, trying aridities will sometimes

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique, et mystique,* η. 976.
* Saint Bonaventure, *Sent.,* L. III; dist. 35, a. I. qu. 2.
• Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 981.
4 Saint Bernard, *Traité de l'Amour de. Dieu,* n. 26.
4 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 981.

appear. Our resignation is gentle. We tell God that life for us is serving and loving Him. Then, what we endure becomes as sweet as consolation.

'We labour less in affective, than in discursive prayer. Reasoning fatigues us; while if our heart is left to love and probe and praise, the soul's repose is sweet. Our energy is preserved for a time of action'.[1] Thus, affective prayer is *much more bountiful* than meditation.

3.—Transition: Meditative to Affective Prayer.

Despite normal and quite legitimate desire, we should not leavç meditation before our time. 'Haste is dangerous. During the change our considerations are mingled with affections; a little later, colloquy seems to replace the considerations,' and our heart begins its speech with God. 'At last we hardly reason any more. The holy converse is ensured. But even so, our spiritual director may permit an occasional consideration, as useful for engaging the mind'.[2]

In religious, and particularly in contemplative life, our soul turns to affective prayer with swiftness and safety,[3] entering in as profoundly as its character permits. Instruction, reading and study bear convictions, then establish them. A supernatural atmosphere holds our mind; and our heart, free of the world, purifying itself instinctively, thirsts for this loving prayer.

4.—Transition: Affective Prayer to Simplicity.

If such unmeditated converse in the heart did not appear untrue and artificial on paper, we should have liked, perhaps, an example. But it consists of the secrets a child tells to its Father in Heaven, and to the All-Holy

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 983.
* Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique, n.* 977.
• Cf. Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 133-134.

Virgin, its watchful Mother of mercy, and to its Friend above all, Jesus, Whom this child yearns to be with. We beg their pardon for all the unkind breaches of our promise. These words are our peace. And we tell them of our joy regained, and how much we crave to love them because of their great love for us. Sometimes this happiness is silent; and God is quiet as He always is. But how well He lets our soul know the nearness of His love. We ask and beg of Him. We rejoice in Him. We long to be filled, dependent, transformed, cleansed—to exist in the midst of the divine Persons, so that their grace might radiate through us to others. For this, our devotion must be absolute, yet ever sensitive to Divine Good Pleasure.

When this converse has been made immaculate in the silence of our regular period of prayer, it gathers subtle generosity into our soul through all the day. Now our scope of meditation is infinite. Remote preparation never ceases. And studying a few needful passages serves to prepare us for immediate prayer. Intellect easily guides the will, and our prayer has become a jewel of simplicity.

But the simplifying goes on. Quickly, yet in degrees, we are actually praying the *prayer of simplicity.*

Now there are some especially sanctified souls who remain in affective prayer. (Are they exceptions? We can only ask the question.) There is a religious in our mind, one of the holiest we have ever known, who passed his days and nights talking with Our Lord and Lady. He was regularly in front of altars and statues; the beads of his Rosary used to wear out. He had to pray with a book. Without it he was almost without God. Yet the speech of love so thoroughly filled his heart that he never left Our Lord. Everything was done in front of Him, in the very soul of tenderness. The generosity of this man never knew a routine act. His degree of detachment and

abandon? It was so high that he used to enquire sincerely whether there was anything left in the world that could touch him.

The Holy Ghost never gave him the gift of contemplation. But still he lived in tremendous union with God; there, it seems, in a fullness of the Gifts of Knowledge and Fortitude.

V.—INTRODUCTION TO THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY.

1.—Elements.

Faithful in prayer and self-denial, we begin to understand truth intuitively, so much has affective prayer simplified the working of our intellect. And our will draws less upon its former array of affections. But we notice one or two that seem to come more often and entertain the soul. Time tests affection; one alone will persist and absorb us for five or ten minutes. Now at the start, most of our period of prayer will not be spent like this; rather, we shall have to pray affectively as usual, being on our particular guard against a lolling, distracting vagueness. However, there will be so much more to each affection, that the number will necessarily be limited.

One affection does dominate, though, fastening itself in our mind and heart. The others are duly subordinate and economical. 'Jesus' keeps coming to our lips, 'Yours alone.' or 'I love You,' centering us deeply into this single, loving affection.

Now out of the two simplifications worked in the intellect and will, there evolves a third; for we find the object of our prayer tending to become unique. With our own kind of obscure and simple love, we dwell upon God, And whether we are aware of His beauty, His bounty, one of His mysteries, His being in the Tabernacle or the Trinity's presence within our soul, we are ever gazing upon God. Bossuet called it the prayer of simplicity. That is what

it is: *love's simple dwelling* upon God and the things of God. In this prayer the soul labours little; it dwells upon its love, then loves the more. It was Saint Thomas who said that love is the beginning and the end of contemplation. And it has been called 'acquired contemplation' by those who hold that our own industry' and God's ordinary graces will gain it.

2.—Similarities in the Natural Order.

Whatever the poet says, love has natural as well as supernatural laws. We are made to love, we must love. What does this mean, if not contemplation? Beholding, we understand. And the more we understand the more we love. Natural similarities reveal much about this simple, dwelling love found in the prayer of simplicity.

Consider a mother bending over the crib of her first child, gazing at him for hours of love, devouring him with her eyes. She thinks of him alone, dwelling on him, silently loving him. Or an artist standing motionless before a horizon, a masterwork, an insect, or a flower. He seems lost. No, it is contemplation. He is admiring something in perfect simplicity. Two friends may not need a word between them, at times; each is tranquil in the goodness of the other and in the goodness of their being together.

Perhaps we may recall our first introduction to a friend. After preparing ourself, we went through the usual, somewhat studied first meeting. But if things went well, there was friendliness, a portion of the heart was exchanged at the end, upon departure. Later on, when we came to be seeing each other daily, preparation was hardly necessary. We were speaking from our heart, yet in the midst of normal conversation. Then one day there was surety between us. It was a new stage. We were no longer

approaching one another, we were friends. After that, we did not have to say much when we were together. A look perhaps, or a word was often enough. Being together was the reality.

Is it not a true mark of friendship this love of being together, without the need of many words? That is a union of hearts. And that is the way of our soul and God. From meditation, through affective prayer, we reach acquired contemplation, or simplicity.

According to Father Poulain: we find 'states of soul in the natural order having exactly the same characteristics that define the prayer of simplicity; however, earthly things, not divine, are considered. Now inasmuch as grace traces its designs upon nature, elevating it at first in a hidden manner, without changing appearances, it follows that there are quite similar states in the supernatural order'.[1]

And so it is not astonishing that many spiritual souls are in the prayer of simplicity, having achieved it with ordinary grace. Mankind is contemplative by nature; those who love more are more contemplative. A temperament that is naturally contemplative, (called 'mystical' by some,) may be given supernatural contemplation more readily. Women arrive at the prayer of simplicity with noticeable ease. Generally speaking, they are *more affective* and less given to reasoning; they are more content than men are, with love's simple dwelling upon God and the things of God.

3.—Object.

The object of our contemplative prayer tends to become unique, as we have said; although later we shall see how there can be certain periodic changes in this. Keeping our

[1] Poulain, *Ordres d'oraison,* p. I, ch. II, n. 14.

mind as quiet as possible, we give ourself to whatever attracts and holds us, whether to God alone, or to Him as He is in His works, perfections or goodness. 'God is love,' expresses the fullness of our love; nor is there anything to be added when we say of, and to the Trinity abiding within us. 'God is here'. And then there is the humanity of Our Lord—the Sacred Humanity that Saint Teresa once avoided, deeming it in her misunderstanding, an obstacle to perfect contemplation ! Saint Bernard used realistically to repeat that Jesus came on earth so that we of the flesh can love Him in the flesh, 'the carnal loving carnally.' But *amor carnalis* leads us to *reasonable love,* as we imitate the virtues of Christ; and finally to *spiritual love,*1 which is a complete binding of ourself to the Word, in whatever manner the Holy Spirit inspires. And so our contemplation will sometimes be the Child Jesus, and other times the Crucified, etc. . . .

Those who thirst for the living presence of Jesus can gaze at the Tabernacle and there meet their Jesus. This is a rich, silent love. It is that of Mary Magdalene at His feet. She used to look upon Him and love Him; and so our happiness too, can be at the foot of the Tabernacle. Made simple in its love, our soul's vision looks to Jesus in the Host residing ever in our churches. How greatly do holy, loving souls love to be with their forgotten, divine prisoner !

Some give a pure, artless love to the Blessed Virgin, gazing at her as does a child at its earthly mother, wordless, happy, often hidden in her arms.

No, God does not *impose* the object of our prayer. But when there is a strong and lasting attraction, let us follow it, abandoning ourself increasingly to Him.

1 Cf. Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XX.

4.—Advantages.

We shall utilise in a different and more productive way, two of the blessings found in affective prayer.

—Praying in simplicity *magnifies our love of God.* Love is the reason for contemplation, of course; but also we contemplate in order to achieve an increasingly perfect love. Such development takes place in prayer during our acts of love.

—And there is a *progressive refinement of conscience* too, as love tries to imitate what it loves. Consequently, we avoid anything that might bring unhappiness; we seek to give gladness, instead, to the loved one. And so, never being out of the presence of God, but there by love, we become more careful and unselfish, pleasing only Him, our Love. Or dwelling upon Our Lord, our love's object, we desire at any cost to resemble Hirn. We shall come to realise then what Mgr. Hedley means: One fervent half-hour or hour contemplating the obedience of Jesus, His patience, His humility, His suffering love would transform our nature more than days of striving to practise the virtues, if this striving were not accompanied by contemplation of our divine model'.[1]

—And as the third and proper blessing of simplicity, this prayer brings *unity into our life.* It is inevitable that contemplation exceeds our formal period of prayer. We discover that it lasts on through the midst of work. By grace, we become mindful of Our Lord, seeing and loving and imitating Him, living under the gaze of God, united to Him.

There are striking natural analogies. The first time a child is separated from its parents, it thinks solely of them and feels dead to everyone else. A fiance dwells continually upon the one he loves. A mother whose son

1 Hedley, *Retraite,* 146, (Bruneau's translation).

is a prisoner, or from whom death has taken an only child, 'lives' with him and with no other. She cannot be distracted by conversation, travel or work. She is rooted into the one she loves. And when two friends are separated, is it essentially different ?

Still, human comparisons are imperfect. The person we are thinking of may not be thinking of us; while God's thought and love are here with us now and forever. A contemplative is aware of this, and thus is lovingly aware of God, always. In fact, there are times when a contemplative soul may be filled, *cum tremore divino,* with such a loving, reverent consciousness of God as to be withdrawn somewhat from the particular sense of liturgical words and prayers. We know Saint Benedict's directive in chapter XIX of his Rule: 'To believe first and foremost in the divine presence when we assist at the Divine Office.' God is glorified by the Word, in the Holy Spirit; and in company with the Blessed Virgin and the Angels we should also glorify God, united to the Word, in the Holy Spirit.

This loving awareness makes it particularly easy to examine our conscience. Watchfulness becomes a habit. An instant's inward glance reveals to us our slightest mis-step; and instantly we return to God. It may happen now, that our love will not be satisfied until it is completely 'virginal in spirit'.

And this is the spirit of prayer. No matter what we do —at study, work, training, dining, resting, recreation— we do with God looking on; we do it in His company and for Him alone. He is our preoccupation. We never leave Him. We never lose the slightest opportunity of giving Him honour, love and glory.

5.—The Spirit of Prayer.

We are brought, then, by simplicity, into the spirit of prayer; we are becoming prayerful souls. This does not mean souls who recite many prayers, but rather souls who are praying always because they are always with God. As much as the soul is with God, it prays, Saint Thomas said.

As a further unfoldment of the spirit of prayer, we are allowed, fortunately, to transcribe a conference given to English Carmelites by V. Rev. Fr. Dom. J. B. Ollitrault de Kérivallan, former Abbot General of the Reformed Cistercians. He described this spirit with the lucidity of one who lived in it; he was profound and cheerful, a perfect monk, humbly detached.

'The object of prayer is to seek God and unite ourselves to Him; created in God's image, our ideal, our perfection, is to do what God does Himself. Now God does two things: He contemplates Himself and He loves Himself; so, in uniting ourselves to Him by prayer, we must do two things: contemplate God and love God. And that is what we should be doing always, uninterruptedly; then there would be no confusion between prayer and prayers.

'Meditation, divine office, (through which we surround the altar with almost ceaseless praise), the *Pater,* that sublime prayer, issuing wholly from the Mind and Heart of God, and which we follow-up instinctively with a tender *Ave Maria,* are prayers, acts; without prayer, or rather the spirit of prayer, these invocations . . . would be mere formula.

'The same holds true for meditation; it is an act. And if, after trying every way possible to reflect throughout a half-hour period, we are not moved by a strong desire to unite ourselves to God, we have made an act; but it is not prayer.

'When we have given our pious exercises all the time prescribed by rule, and have done everything, we often imagine that we have satisfied the commitment of prayer; we have made acts. But these exercises have been given to us by God in order to facilitate prayer, that spirit of prayer animating our actions, that presence of God which we should constantly safeguard.

'Among people in the world, prayer consists in supplication for this or that often purely natural grace; they pray in order to ask, they make acts, but they do not have the spirit of prayer.

'Many definitions have been given, distinguishing contemplative, active and mixed lives; true distinctions, but at the heart of the matter, is not their object the same, to do what God does? And what does He do? He contemplates Himself and He loves Himself. He wants His creatures to do the same. For that, He created Adam and Eve, beautiful images of God, who, imitating their Divine Model, gazed upon Him and loved Him ceaselessly; and God, delighted at seeing Himself thus beheld and loved, used to come down and converse with them in a most intimate friendliness !

'Sin destroyed this harmony, and union with God became a hardship for His creature. To make up for this, God introduced religious, for He wished to be held in contemplation and love; and herein we have the spirit of prayer. The religious state grants a most favourable environment for it: silence and the example of others develops our spirit of prayer, otherwise called the presence of God in our hearts. It is true prayer, giving the value to whatever we do.

'Place, work, the condition of life in which we find ourselves, active or contemplative—nothing matters as long as we are able to see God and love Him. Then we have

everything we need . . . and our vision, seeing far in its faith, penetrates through everything to Him; this is where the saints gather.

'At times we find difficulties in prayer, distractions, obstacles which almost always come from preoccupation with things we have done or must do. Let us take these distractions as a warning; if God permits them to be troublesome during our prayers, it is in order to show us that we are not praying with enough devotion, not praying to achieve prayer, which is contemplation and love. God would not permit anything that was created for His praise to impede prayer.

'And we are often worried about our prayers, wondering anxiously whether they are good. The way to know is to see if, after prayer, after dwelling on Him, we have a real desire to contemplate Him further (so that we may know Him better), to love Him and to unite ourselves more intensely to Him as proof of our love. Since our beatitude in Heaven will consist in beholding and loving God, let us begin apprenticeship this moment, in what is to be our continuous heavenly occupation.

'Let us contemplate God and love Him!'

There is no reason why many should not understand this state of prayer, and what is more, come to live in it; such souls would well be envied. And our personal conclusion is that we are not only able, but are actually meant to aspire to what Saint Basil calls 'the beautiful prayer.' We have seen that on the natural level man tends instinctively towards simple, loving contemplation; it is normal, then, that this tendency should be found in the supernatural. And provided we are careful, it should not be presumptuous to guide souls little by little toward this prayer.

6.—Precautions.

—If insufficiently prepared, and not really prompted by grace, we would be courting danger to enter this state, for it would be *doing our own will.* Nor should the advantages of this prayer impel us to any sudden conclusion: 'Hereafter, simplicity is the prayer for me! I shall just be quiet and wait!' Our wait might be a long one.

We follow our own inclinations on the natural plane; we do not, supernaturally. For every true kind of prayer presupposes a purifying course of self-denial. Higher prayer demands deeper purification. On the supernatural plane, God graces our understanding and will in accord with the prayer He gives; our attraction to this prayer, and our ease with it, signify the grace He has given.

We must be humble and wait for God, follow His grace, never anticipating Him; for He may give us a facility, then take it away and leave us stripped. Then we shall know what it is to be without God. And regressing to former methods of prayer, we beseech Him, if He wills, to raise us again.

—And it is wrong to *scorn these prayers,* saying 'Contemplation? Illusion!'; or in an outburst of false humility, 'The prayer of simplicity is too high for me! I haven't got it now and never shall!'

On the contrary, in religion, and of course in a contemplative life, such prayer comes easily. Dom Lehodey said this often: 'In contemplative orders we achieve it quickly, almost naturally, along with purity of soul and a loving heart. We meditate on the word of God, read it, and hear it everywhere. Is it any wonder that we feel a need to assimilate it in prayerful colloquy? The mind is suffused; the heart indeed wants to speak.

Office long enough almost to preclude appropriate meditation, and the holy habit of ejaculations during all types of work, accustom the soul to affectionate converse with God'.[1]

—Let us put aside any thought that we *waste our time in the prayer of simplicity!* True, it often seems a little too simple, and as if we were in idleness, doing nothing. Father Poulain answers this classical objection: 'Superficially considered, the prayer appears simple. Yet we do exactly the same things in it that we do in meditation. This means labour. But our labour is more simple, more gentle; and though less apparent, it is none the less real'.[2]

God acts first. Whatever happens in our soul during prayer is a result of God's action co-operating with our own. Hardly feeling this interaction, we doubt it. Nevertheless, we must remain formable, giving ourself to Him so that He can give Himself to us through our understanding and love. And during all this He sustains us and actually helps us to carry on in our own manner.

And we are able to appraise the great things done in our soul by this prayer of simplicity. For there is a new impetus in our practising of virtue, a fineness of conscience, a generosity we had not before; and the loving awareness of God becomes still more precious to us. Further examination will reveal that if we were to protract this prayer it could be very tiring. Certainly this is no result of idleness. But during our allotted period of prayer everything goes well. Only when we have remained in it for several hours, as during retreat, do we realise its wearing effect. 'Thus, God's simple, frictionless action can at the same moment be so intensely captivating as to exhaust us!

—Finally, we must beware any *lack of balance and*

[1] Lchodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 215.
[2] Poulain, *Ordres d'oraison,* p. I, ch. II, n. 44.

discretion. The prayer of simplicity is so sweet to the soul that we are tempted to linger in it. For example, when certain religious are enjoying periods of special fervour, they like to spend their intervals in this state. That is spiritual greed. Such indulgence may induce a potentially dangerous mental fatigue. Even for a soul very much 'in' this prayer, a wise director must know when to enjoin spiritual reading; first, because the prayer of simplicity does not feed the intelligence very much, and second, as a precaution against fatigue of mind. 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' There is no need to risk a weariness that might tempt us to despair and to give up. There should be prudence and discretion even in the best of things; and no matter what facility we might be given, let us pray that balance will safeguard our prayer.

7.—The Soul's Readiness.

We must be evenly sensitive to the will of God: being neither hypersensitive and anticipating His grace, nor insensitive and hampering His action. Regarding the prayer of simplicity, we should consider first two general dispositions: 'a certain distaste and fruitlessness in regard to discursive prayer' (we assume that the soul is fervent and striving to meditate properly) . . .' 'and a desire to simplify prayer, to be with God, beholding Him. . . ,'[1]

But 'desire alone is not enough, we must see if it comes from God'.[2] And so when we are sure of these dispositions, believing in the attraction, we permit a trial. If two more signs appear, they are sufficient and our trial is justified: 'success in prayer and profitable results*;[3] success and

1 Tanquerey, *Précis d'ascétique et mystique,* η. 1,374.
* Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 212.
3 Poulain, *Ordres d'oraison,* p. I, ch. II, n. 53.

profit certainly equal to that achieved when the soul used other methods. 'If anyone succeeds in, and profits from a holy occupation, what possible reason is there to turn him away from it'?[1]

If our prayer gives us into the hands of God, and there finds His blessing, if we are present to Him more each day, offering more love, then in confidence let us give ourself to this prayer. Our conduct during aridity will be discussed later.

8.—Proximate Preparation.

Is an overnight preparation still necessary? After all, our soul is now awakened and generally aware of the presence of God; is definite preparation worthwhile or even advisable?

In general, yes there must be a certain amount of preparation; we never know tomorrow or tomorrow's prayer. And our own audacity and impertinence in not preparing for conversation with God might appear if God were but to leave us, temporarily, to our own devices! And since such preparation helps us to be reverently confident, Saint Francis of Sales could not but disapprove of anyone disdaining to practise it.

But the preparation is less defined than it was for meditation and affective prayer; spiritual reading will do, ordinarily. And in case we are given no special attraction during prayer, we can draw upon the considerations that are latent in us from our reading. Now remembering that the prayer itself works primarily in our heart, it should be clear why faithfulness in reading is so important, why there is so much responsibility attached to the new freedom; for what we read awakens, nourishes and brings light to our intelligence.

[1] Poulain, *Ordres d'oraison,* p. I, ch. II, n. 54.

It is good for the subject of our reading and the object of our prayer to correspond, and to be like simplicity itself, unique and uncomplex . . . as are Jesus and the very thought of God, the Trinity indwelling in us, and the Blessed Virgin.

VI.—SIMPLICITY: THE PERIOD OF INTENSE ATTRACTION.

We shall suggest certain procedure for different stages in this prayer. Considering first the period of intense attraction, our illustration is the concrete one of a soul that is drawn by Our Lord to pray before the Tabernacle.

1.—Sweetness in Prayer.

As always, we put ourself in the presence of God, but this is not difficult if we are fervent and consoled, or in the state of prayer; for a customary, loving awareness of Jesus *is* the presence of God. So kneeling, recollecting, our distractions begin to vanish away. We look steadily upon the Tabernacle. His presence becomes more intense. Then in a quick movement we are caught, as it were, and drawn further in until our loving, simple eye rests upon Our Lord Who is present in the Host. Then our prayer is nothing but a thoughtful, loving sweetness.

Jesus is here. And feeling His gaze of love we know that His happiness is to see us here; His joy is in us, and ours is in Him. Words are unnecessary. And so the time goes. An evenly burning fire, Dom Lehodey remarks, should be left alone; but if it subsides we use the bellows to quicken it again. And so we use affections to revive prayer, to steady it and to keep our attention alert and free from any slackening. These affections are hardly more than a word: 'Jesus'—'I love You' . . . etc. Half an hour passes in this even flame of love. And our heart has travelled with our gaze into the Tabernacle where it

finds the Heart of Jesus. There, peaceful, sweet happiness holds us captive.

Yet all things must come to an end. We have to make a real effort, and what pain it is to interrupt that dwelling together! We half-murmur to Jesus to prolong the parting, but we must go. *Mane Nobiscum Domine!* "Stay with us Lord." It almost seems as if He would detain us. But duty calls; He wants us to go from Him, to find Him elsewhere. And so we offer Him the sacrifice. And although we leave unexpressed the acts of gratitude and resolution that usually follow prayer, our resolve is equally effective. We are physically apart from the Tabernacle; yet united to Jesus in heart and mind, our prayer continues as the eyes of memory go on gazing into the Tabernacle.

We should apply ourself to the next occupation as well as possible, for whatever it is, it is the will of God. Now sometimes we shall be distracted—our work has a right to certain attention—but at its first opportunity our mind will slip back to rejoin the heart in God, for our heart has never left the One it loves. Then all the soul is lovingly aware of Him once more. Should the distraction last, we experience a restive longing for God; yet this sweet state of prayer is such, that often, raising our eyes to the church or a word or two from our heart, or extra vigour in our work will return us to Him again!

Work finished, one thing matters: Jesus in the Tabernacle. We return, 'as the hart panteth after the fountains of waters';[1] beside ourself with happiness, caring for nothing else. At last! 'Jesus, I have found You again!' And reposing in Him, we breathe and live once more. Thus it is at every interval.

[1] Cf. Luke, XXIV, 29.
[2] Psalm XLI, 2.

There is no interference with Divine Office, of course. And if the Novice Master thinks it wise, reading that matches our attraction is in order. But if there should be some particularly fruitful thought, let us stop the reading, and remaining where we are, give ourself to prayer.

Now it is possible that this very sweetness in prayer can render us incapable of reading, praying vocally or hearing a sermon. There is the recent case of a Cistercian nun who was not able to complete the three *Aves* given her each Saturday morning as Sacramental penance. At the very first words she would be so taken by the thought of God that she could not continue. This happened consistently throughout the day. And only that night, retiring to rest, would she be able to finish the prayers, and then with great pain and speed. Permission to write the penance gave her considerable relief. 'Now it is quite safe to think about God again,' she said, 'what good fortune! '

The thought of Jesus is always present when He draws us this way; even awakening we find Him already waiting. And to be happy means to be near Him. *Bonum est nos hic esse.*[1] 'Master, it is good for us to be here,' shall we make a tabernacle? At work we love to look to the church, for there is our Tabernacle. How well we know that He is ever coming out from there to be with us, for we are His everlasting work and occupation. And Jesus is our Great residing in the Tabernacle; amidst the details of psalms and antiphons we chant and are aware only of Him, dwelling with Him in loving union. At refectory too, whatever we do is for Him, in His presence. This is how the unity of God is present in, and uniting every aspect of our life.

1 Luke, IX, *33.*

Such sweet union with Jesus is actually an intense love. By experiencing Him, by being in Him, our faith is heightened as it never could be otherwise. And God grants this gift in order that our faith may remain unalterable in any circumstance of abundance or desolation; so that, totally devoted to Jesus, we shall do all things rejoicing in our faith and love.

The sweetness of this state of contemplation is described beautifully in the hymns for the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. Although not composed by Saint Bernard, we are convinced that the author knew him personally, or else that he must have known well the same state of heart and soul that the Saint knew.

Jesu dulcis memoria,	Jesus ! the very thought of Thee,
Dans vera cordi gaudia:	With sweetness fills my breast;
Sed super mei et omnia	But sweeter far Thy face to see.
Ejus dulcis praesentia.	And in Thy presence rest.

How good is the remembrance of Jesus, but what a greater good to find Him !

Jesu spes poenitentibus,	O hope of every contrite heart,
Quam pius es petentibus !	O joy of all the meek,
Quam bonus te quaerentibus !	To those who fall, how kind Thou art!
Sed quid invenientibus/	How good to those who seek !

Our heart cries forth: *'quid invenientibus?'*

Nec lingua valet dicere,	But what to those who find ? ah ! this
Nec littera exprimere:	Nor tongue nor pen can show :
Expertus potest credere,	The love of Jesus, what it is,
Quid sit Jesum diligere.	None but His lovers know.

The author cannot express his joy in any other way. He sings, and what he sings of is untranslatable. He repeats, but it is not repetitious :

1 cf. Maurice Brillant, *Le plus bel Amour,* variations on a theme, (Commentary).

Quando cor nostrum visitas,	When once Thou visitest the heart
Tunc lucet ei veritas,	Then truth begins to shine ;
Mundi vilescit vanitas	Then earthly vanities depart ;
Et intus fervet caritas.	Then kindles love divine.
Jesu decus Angelicum.	O, Jesus, thou the beauty art
In aura dulce canticum,	Of angel worlds above !
In ore mei mirificum,	Thy name is music to the heart,
In corde nectar coelicum.	Enchanting it with love.
Qui te gustant esuriunt,	Celestial sweetness unalloyed !
Qui bibunt adhuc sitiunt:	Who eat Thee, hunger still ;
Desiderare nesciunt	Who drink of Thee still feel a void,
Nisi Jesum quem diligunt.	Which nought but Thou canst fill,
Mane nobiscum Domine !	Rest here with us, oh Lord !
Jesu, flos matris Virginis	Jesus, flower of the Virgin-Mother:
Amor nostrae dulcedinis. . . .	*You sweetness of our love!* . . . .

A magnificent call to every soul of love, especially to those having experience of the state we have attempted to describe: *expertus potest credere.* It echoes Saint Bernard's own words: 'Jesus is honey in my mouth, melody to my ear, a cry of gladness in my heart. . . .'[2]

2.—Dryness and Aridity.

We did not realise how very easy it had been for us to find Jesus, until He hid Himself. Suddenly He is gone and we are helpless, knowing neither why, nor what to do. Is it our fault or not? Are we being called back to order, or is He actually bestowing arid contemplation upon us ?

Dryness Through Our Own Fault.

This prayer is normally sweet and very simple. And for that very reason we run a risk of abusing its graces. It is not impossible that we should come to regard such facility

[1] Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, from the Hymns of Vespers, Matins and Lauds.

[2] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Sermo XV, 6.

as our own, or self-satisfied, to think: 'How good my prayer is, what glory for God, I must be truly an interior soul . . . perhaps a saint.' Or disdainful and not knowing it, we may judge our brethren: he still uses beads, or, he is forever tied to that book . . . etc. Now when humility goes, so does generosity, and we are left with presumption. Being able to find God so easily we begin to believe that He is at our disposal; we become very sure of ourself; then mortification appears no longer necessary, and our generosity need not bother with trifles anymore. The spirit of silence is often lost, too, and we may even commence to give descriptions of our interior fife to others!

This is a veritable abuse of grace. God permits no such self-illusion for long; He will cast dryness and aridity upon us. And that is a period when we are hardly able to return to Him during a whole day of work, a period when He seems to have departed even from the church itself.

Discovering our dryness, we give ourself a quick, clear examination. If we are guilty, we humble ourself before God: 'The fault is mine, Lord. Oh thank You, my good God, for calling me back to You.' And a humble disclosure to our Father Master or director is wise. He will advise us: 'Go back to the Tabernacle. Even if God does not draw you, pray there. Go back to your routine of prayer and reading. Keep trying to return to God.' And soon enough we shall find Jesus again, perhaps more sweetly than before. Then let us thank Him with a contrite, humble heart: I have been negligent, oh Jesus! I abused Your graces. And now I barely ask, and You come back! You are so unutterably good and forgiving!'

From this time forward we shall know more thoroughly than ever that if Jesus is present all goes well—if not—we can do nothing; and the grace of sweetness as well as

the facility in returning to Him are both love-gifts that could never conceivably originate in us. We have paid for precious experience, yes; the expense is ours, but so is the profit !

Dryness Without Fault (Arid Contemplation).

Supposing on the other hand, that we have been generously faithful, and that simple, honest self-examination supports the fact, then we are assured of aridity. And we may conclude with Saint Benedict that God wishes to raise His servant higher, after a trial of purification. In such aridity the awareness or remembrance of Jesus is gone, yet our desire for Him is absolutely real; we know He has not deserted us, and that it is the grace of God which is generating in us our strong will to pray. The greater our aridity, the more intense our desire. Were this a case of dryness through fault, prayer would be repugnant and we might have to bind ourself in duty to go to the Tabernacle. But it is not so, now; for we are tortured by desire of Jesus, and like one in a burning thirst, we search for Him, Jesus, the source of living water !

Once we took much of this water; now it is only a hope. We cannot reach Him. We are given nothing for our thirst. The Tabernacle draws us, and how easily our distractions fall away, too; but we are not held, captivated as before. And still it is good to be here. Sweet contact does not seem far off. Sometimes we are silent, sometimes we say a few words; but they only revive our desire and give it nothing. Then we face reality: Jesus is neither taking us to Him, nor allowing us to find Him.

Nature presses us to go: 'Nothing to be gained, nothing to be done.' Yet we stay. Fatigue may overtake us, and slowly we do go, almost hearing the question at the

church door: where will you go? For wherever we go, there is a kind of agony within us. We pick up a book and all it does is to revive the desire which nothing can satisfy. We are obsessed, hounded by one thought: Jesus. No other word exists for us. And all during this time it is impossible for us not to be more faithful and generous than ever, in the smallest details, attentive to the purity of our soul, lest we lose Him through fault of our own.

But one day Jesus allows us to find Him again. In happiness and joy we enter and partake of Him. He is more marvellous, if possible, more precious now. 'Thank You, my Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself back to me again!' For this is the way God works within, teaching us to be watchful, faithful and filled with generosity. This is how our heavenly nostalgia will be purified and a new fineness of love will come and fill our soul.

3.—The Example of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene, model of the highest states of contemplation, can help us to understand many things about the prayer of simplicity. At Bethany her prayer was one of sweetness; and she reposed, tranquil at the feet of the Master, while He defended her against reproach. But when Our Lord disappeared and died, and when the sepulchre was empty of His body, then her love, her unique possession, absorbed Mary Magdalene so that she was beyond all the things of life save one: to find Jesus. She questioned and could not comprehend the answers, like the Canticle's spouse and the watchmen of the city. And she did not even recognise Our Lord when she found Him.

What is aridity in contemplative souls, but a state in which nothing is real; and lost to their object of love words fall soundlessly about them.....

4.— Alternating Consolation and Aridity.

If the prayer of simplicity continues, we shall find ourself sometimes in sweetness and at other times in arid contemplation. But at all times our soul experiences an attraction so vivid as to detach it utterly; and this attraction becomes tempered, refined and very personal. In these pages thus far, we have used the illustration of Jesus in the Tabernacle in order to be precise; now we shall speak of God, trusting that the general term will enable us more easily to envisage our own particular attraction.

Out of the extremes of alternation, God guides our soul into a pure balance of self-denial and generosity. His light reveals small infidelities unseen before; and humble compunction is gratefully added to our balance.

At the beginning our sweetness is keen; at the beginning of every stage in prayer we feel the freshness of His grace. And then the soul comes to desire nothing more, believing itself at the summit; the simple sweetness has become more full, more possessing, until our soul seems satisfied completely. But why is the grace infinitely more stirring when we approach Our Lord in the Tabernacle? Who can measure the influence of the Holy Humanity of Jesus. . . .

This is our state of prayer, then, until God should see fit to raise it again, infusing His gift of contemplation. But we shall treat of this in Book Two.

VIL—PERSEVERANCE IN THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY.

i.—Perseverance is Difficult.

A gréât number of souls achieve this state of prayer quite easily; yet strictly speaking, few of them go on to what are known as mystical states. Now it is possible to spend a lifetime in the prayer of simplicity. But must we conclude that the majority of souls who do not pass beyond this state make no more real progress? Definitely not. For simplicity is a true state of contemplation in which we can attain *great* sanctity.

But will our fervour continue? Souls must be particularly careful in this matter, which is why we have taken the liberty of emphasizing the methods to be used when the state is prolonged. For in all truth, it is easier to arrive at, than to remain in this prayer. How many have tasted of simplicity and then become careless as its sweetness diminished ! If at this period we are not given help, if we do not understand the nature of the effort we must make ourself, then we slide down, gradually becoming adjusted to a kind of spiritual vagueness. This is the loss of our interior life. It is mediocrity, routine, being neither hot nor cold ... It is a crucial time, and if we have not done so already, we should locate a spiritual director who grasps the situation and can give our soul support and encouragement.

Bit by bit, our sweetness departs, yet God demands the same fidelity. His grace is acting in a profounder and more spiritual manner; though it does not seem as strong

because we feel it less. Everything was easy before. Now, God is allowing our soul to work its own way. He has not regretted His gifts: nor is He removing us from the state of acquired contemplation into which He placed us. It is simply that He wishes us to carry on more and more by dint of our own hard, courageous work.

Saint Benedict's fourth degree of humility treats of this perseverance. We are to be faithful in reading, prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, returning to God; continuing on, in other words, 'as if' we were finding Jesus, as if we were continually in His sweetness. Yet all the while, God's action is hidden. Generously, faithfully we must try to pray, never relaxing our interior and exterior mortification. This is how we shall maintain our desire of God and sensitivity in conscience, the two great signs of fervour. Only on this condition can we follow along the way He leads us.

Intending to be more precise later, we mention at this place that God will come from time to time, visiting us with forceful, sustaining graces. These will redouble our desire for purification. T am at hand; confidence ! Cease not to purify yourself; I shall ever be working on unobserved, within you !'

2.—Obscurity and Vagueness.

Our present state is one of habitual dryness, despite its fluctuations. The attitude we should take throughout the day is clear; but what of prayer itself, especially when God's attraction feels so weak? One question is important: are we wandering or do we pray, really? Are we in a state of vagueness or are we still obscurely aware that God is drawing us, and attending in some manner, our prayer ? It is essential to differentiate clearly between "obscurity" and "vagueness."

In *obscurity* we are drawn by God. He is ever solicitous. And despite distractions we return to Him almost automatically. During the time 'when prayer was sweet' He held us in such a way that distractions found nothing to grasp. This new divine action is just as real, but of a deeper order; and distractions now assault that part of the soul that was previously subject to intense impressions. Not unlike a partially neutralised magnet, God still attracts, but without taking us fully to Himself. He is insistent, though; and the further we should stray the more imperiously He recalls us, reproaching us. But when we are back with Him again we feel nothing. And so we find that neither can we leave God, nor will He take us back to Him as we want.

Now in a state of *vagueness,* God seems to leave us to ourself. There is no attraction whatsoever; we can be indefinitely distracted and not experience a recall to order. We return to Him of our own accord. And by what is unquestionably an effort of our own will, we think of Him and try to go up to Him, though we are not assisted or drawn. Even the Tabernacle is like an empty thing to us.

It is important to distinguish between the two kinds of dryness, for our conduct will differ in each.

3.—Conduct in Obscurity.

What are we to do when pursued by the thought of God and ceaselessly distracted at the same time? With the utmost persistence we are to let each distraction fall away and then return to God, let the next fall away and return to Him again, and so on, enduring relentlessly for as long as we must. And there must not be any struggle or violence in this steady movement of love; we merely go over and beyond each distraction, to re-find God, to be with Him again.

This is not the time for meditative-reading, or for any of the other alternatives to prayer. They will not succeed, but will only divert and paralyse the divine action; besides, if they were capable of promoting union with God, it would be easy enough to follow them. Let us return to our simple, loving gaze, even though we know it will be interrupted.

It is a painful, profitable state; it is real contemplation. And our soul does not know, in its dryness, how very pure and holy God is making it. We should give ourself completely to our director, who will sanction this blind perseverance, knowing how thoroughly our courage is interwoven with God's action.

Here are the words of Father Grou: 'What did Mary do at Bethany? She would sit in repose, filled with peace and silence. Jesus was the one Who talked, and with her whole heart she listened. It is not related that she spoke to Jesus Christ or interrupted Him. But as a disciple she received her Master's teaching and would let it gently penetrate her soul. This is a model of perfect prayer. Our soul is not to breathe out its feelings or reflections, but is to give absolutely soundless attention to the One Who is instructing it'.[1]

And Mary Magdalene reposing at the feet of Jesus is a portrait of our simple prayer of sweetness. Father Grou continues: 'When, by God's grace, we are called to this kind of prayer, we are not meant to leave it for any reason of distraction, dryness, boredom or temptation; but we are to persevere, by absorbing every pain, by allowing ourself to be persuaded that we are doing much and doing the Will of God, even when such prayer seems totally a waste. This is burdensome, and we are to be brave. The desert of prayer we walk is a bare and obscure

[1] Grou: *Manuel des âmes intérieures,* 201.

one, empty of thoughts and affections. However this is the way we shall advance in dying to ourself and living in God'.[1]

We must be faithful to our periods of prayer, never substituting for them a book or a contemplative walk, never curtailing their time; and faithful in such spiritual exercises as visiting the Blessed Sacrament and the practice of returning to God; and finally, refusing any temptations toward exterior or interior immortification.

4.—Conduct in Vagueness.

In the preceding state God attracted us; and although it was difficult and obscure to perceive, His attraction was real. Now this is gone. Now we undertake our simple prayer only out of habit, duty or willpower; and we are even tempted to put it aside without further ado, and resort to certain facile alternatives.

But at this stage, our period of prayer is more important than ever, not to mention the usual self-denial and supplication that preserve us in an atmosphere of recollection. If we give up, we shall no longer enjoy the state of simplicity to which God has led us; then we should be in a condition of 'dryness through fault.' Following such insensitivity, God would cease to draw us to Him; and unless corrected at once, our danger would be serious. But let us note carefully that vagueness is not always a result of fault. It can be ascribed to poor health or to other trials permitted by God.

What should we do at prayer? We should strive always to find God; to find His presence and put ourself in it. Sometimes in a twinkling God will draw us very close. But if we should catch sight of an incoming vagueness with its allied reverie, let us resolve instantly upon either

[1] Grou: *Manuel des âmes intérieures,* 201-202.

affective prayer or meditation (especially meditative reading), or whatever alternative is best for us.

Of course this is very hard for a soul that has known the prayer of simplicity. It is somewhat like the story of the child who was given bread covered with butter and jam;and because he used to eat just the butter and jam, his parents decided that a slice of dry bread would do thereafter. Certainly more than a light effort is required in order to return to past methods. But who knows what profit there will be from a humble, generous act like this ? Still, without it we should risk being confirmed in vagueness and sloth, or sojourning in a state of *dolce far niente.* No, God does not draw us. So now at all costs we must go and look for Him. We search through those ways closest at hand, meditative reading, the Rosary or the Stations of the Cross. . . .

Our doing this pleases God; it is what He wants and what He waits for, when we are in this state. For then no one can say that we arc searching for self. It is humiliating and we are humbled. Acts of love like these are disinterested. And if it were to mean a whole day: 'My God, I should never give up searching for You ! ' Then we know that He will reward us in Ilis time; and in the depths of our soul, despite everything, we are at peace.

This wandering in mind, this reverie, can threaten us at any time. In or out of prayer, then, let us be prepared to repel it with skill and finality the moment we discover it. For if we resist in the beginning, when it is still an abstract figure in our thought, we have all the advantage; but if it develops and becomes a concrete figure in our senses, it can carry us very far, for a very long time.

Our life may thus be one of alternating vagueness and obscurity, sometimes visited by something like its former fervour. Now if this state should last, a new phase in simplification will presently arrive.

VIII.—FAITH AND ABANDONMENT IN THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY.

i.—Further Simplification : Continuous Prayer.

After perhaps years in this prayer, it may undergo a further, simpler modification. We discover God again, but in hardly as perceptible a manner as before. (Let us not forget that less sweetness does not signify any lessening whatsoever in God's inward action.) Beholding Him in prayer, being lovingly aware of Him throughout the day, is now such a naturally simple, subtle habit, that certain souls wonder whether it could still be called prayer; and our acts of intellect and will are almost suspiciously unapparent. We ask, has prayer stopped ?

Now when a director has been in touch with a soul for any length of time, it is quite easy for him to discern its state; but in the incidental case of a soul encountered, say, during a retreat, it can be difficult to judge. And so an understanding of such souls is valuable ; for, too often misunderstood, they suffer. Disarranged so to speak, and having fruitlessly tried to find God in the former prayer of their heart and in meditation, they have found Him nowhere. For them, convincing reassurance is needed.

Yet by presenting a reasonable deduction to someone in this state, it is possible to give assurance that this prayer is real.

Outside of God, what interests you ?'

'Why, absolutely nothing ! The minute a duty is finished my mind goes right back to God. But not like before. Now

it is different, somehow; my heart does not seem to be on fire or rejoice with Him the way it did. I am not even sure that I am making acts of faith and love, any more!'

'Nevertheless, you still remain perfectly firm in doing everything you can to please God, avoiding anything that might offend Him?'

'Oh yes! *Indeed!*'

'Then be at peace. You are praying all the time. Your prayer has been reduced to an even more simple, more essential state.' (For what else is prayer but an alignment of your soul with God, and a conforming of your will to His, so that you adhere to Him always, in faith and love.) 'This is happening in you. Your adherence to God is a result of a perfect balance in your soul, to adapt Saint Francis of Sales' expression.'

This is what Bossuet, Father de Caussade and others term the *prayer of pure faith*. If we recall that metaphysics is the study of being without its accidents, we might say that we are down to the metaphysics of prayer. And a grand simplification like this is of course confusing to someone involved who is not enlightened. In this state, then, our own soul is unconscious of its prayer; yet we are praying all the time, just as we are loving and breathing all the time.

In different passages Father Grou describes this *continuous prayer*. For example, in his *Manuel des âmes intérieures:* How can we pray always? 'By the prayer of our heart. It consists in being habitually, constantly disposed to love God, to be confident in Him and obedient to His will ... ; ever attentive to the voice of God that we hear inside our conscience. . . . God desires this disposition of heart in every soul, for no one can disagree that Jesus Christ speaks to all Christians when He says that it is necessary to pray always; and without a doubt

all would arrive at this state if they responded faithfully to the grace that is drawing them.

'Let Love of God so dominate our heart that the domination becomes natural; let not a single thing oppose this love; by pleasing God in everything and refusing Him in nothing, let every moment augment this love; let us accept whatever comes as coming directly from the hand of God; let us possess an imperishable determination never to commit a deliberate fault; and if in our misfortune, we should fall, let us humble ourself then and there, and rising, set forth again; then we shall be in continuous prayer.

'Such prayer will subsist in the midst of our occupations, engagements, innocent amusements. . . . In this state we are not always thinking of God directly, but we never linger voluntarily upon a useless thought, still less on a bad one. Nor we do make endless acts and prayers, but *our heart is always turned towards God* (the essence of prayer), ever attentive to Him, ever ready to do His will.

'How wrong we should be to think that prayer is real only when we are aware of it. They asked Saint Anthony what was the finest way of praying and he answered that it was what we do when: 'at prayer, we do not know we pray.* How good a prayer is this, wherein our self-love finds no support. . . . Continuous prayer then, is not difficult prayer. . . . However, it is very uncommon because so few hearts are disposed in courage and faith enough to persevere.'[1]

It is important for directors to familiarise themselves with this state, in order that they can be of help to the helpless: that is, to any good souls who pray and fear they do not, and who, doing much, fear lest they do nothing.

[1] Grou: *Manuel des âmes intérieures,* 223-224.

Now hear Father de Foucauld[1] on this subject, after which he will indicate our line of conduct: Our soul is a house of prayer. From it, uninterrupted prayer should rise like incense to Heaven. . . . Let us strive with all our strength to see that our mind is always occupied with God, or with the things He wants us to do for Him; and even while doing these things we should be observing Him constantly, without ever taking an iota of our heart away—eyes upon God, or on our work whenever necessary —but our heart with Him alone: let God be King of our thoughts, Lord of our thoughts, let the thought of Him never leave us, and let everything we say, do and think be for Him, directed by His love.'

'He is the most cherished thought residing in our soul; and so we must see to it that our soul is a house of prayer at all times, never a den of thieves. No stranger is to enter it, nor anything profane, for even a fleeting moment. Our Beloved One must be our eternal occupation. True love never loses sight of what it loves.'[2]

'The hours we consecrate solely to prayer will give us, by God's grace, the strength to preserve His presence throughout the rest of the day. They launch us into what we call continuous prayer.'[3]

'You see, (Jesus said to him) praying is thinking of Me and loving Me everywhere. . . . The more you love, the better you pray; prayer is your soul's attention lovingly fixed on Me; the more that love holds your attention, the better your prayer will be.'[4]

'This prayer is a perpetual attention of love, demanding profound recollection, absolute detachment, perfect purity

1 Cf. J. Dermine. *La vie spirituelle du P. de Foucauld,* 103-104.
2 De Foucauld, *Ecrits spirituels,* 14.
3 De Foucauld, *Ecrits spirituels,* 23.
4 De Foucauld, *Ecrits spirituels,* 162.

in heart; it is an ascetical drive that never wanes.'[1]

'It is necessary (Jesus said, still talking to him) to do away with all that is not Me ... to become a desert where you can be alone with Me, as holy Magdalene was alone with Me in the desert. You will achieve that by detachment, by putting to flight every thought, even infinitesimal ones which are not bad in themselves, but which nevertheless succeed from morning until night in keeping your mind distant from Me, instead of which, from morning until night you should be contemplating Me.'[2]

2.—Line of Conduct.

Having grasped Father de Foucauld's advice, we shall see now that souls in this especially simple state of prayer should bear in mind the two characteristics of fervent spiritual progress: an ever increasing but peaceful desire for God, and an exceedingly fine conscience. Henceforth these bear witness to our soul's effort.

The major task of a *refined conscience* is to prune away any unfruitful thoughts and desires, or more exactly, to let them fall away. This includes everything that does not come from God or that is not in harmony with Him: all feelings, and every trace of that kind of interior examination in which, either with love or with loathing we seek ourself. Refinement in conscience establishes a heightened purity of heart. We are gradually drawn out of things and brought to a state of careful, inner silence, in which we humbly attend the movement of the Holy Ghost.

As patiently as He wishes, God works our soul in to the same state which the rapid, violent, passively-purifying Nights will produce in another soul. In this we are stripped. It is the state so celebrated by Saint John of the Cross. It

[1] Cf. J. Dermine, *La vie spirituelle du P. de Foucauld,* 104.
[2] De Foucauld, *Ecrits spirituels,* 119.

is the delight of our soul. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.* Now whereas in the Nights we are taken and unreservedly detached by God alone, in the slower process there is a certain freedom. We could resist. But we are meant to give of our own choice, and to give more and more. And at the end everything is gone; for God desires everything.

Now prayer is the most direct means by which we may possess a *desire of God.* We must be faithful to our schedule, having generosity enough never to increase or shorten a period wilfully; and in 'obscurity' let us co-operate with God's purification by our unwavering, dry prayer; or we may have to attempt to pray as we did in past stages, yet never hesitating amidst whatever 'vagueness' God gives us.

By mortification also, and by seeking God again in our desires,[1] we shall be doing His will. For His will is a matter of detaching ourself from things created and attaching ourself to their Creator; to be 'despoiled in spirit' corresponds to 'Virginity of spirit,' and actually complements it. No *aversio a Deo* will becloud us if we remain united to God in perfect balance of soul. And such balance is sustained when we return to Him often in this simple manner: we elevate our soul, breathe in the spirit of God, and looking to Him for a moment, gently let ourself be drawn up. . . .

Our soul is attracted to certain reading, too, which nourishes the mind; and through this we become more completely desirous of God. Such completeness implies the development of various aspects of our soul. We shall take this occasion to point out the fact that *our attraction varies;* in fact it does so steadily. Natural evolvement combined with divine action will keep it in a state of change, and without a predictable order: God, the Trinity,

[1] Bélorgey, *Sous le Regard de Dieu,* 67-77.

Jesus, Mary, etc. . . . And perhaps our attraction will even become indistinct and general, resolving itself out in us as a growing desire to belong wholly to God. If so, this is a time when we may substitute an attraction of will for the attraction of grace; we should choose a subject for study and then draw upon the pure sources of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the Order of Liturgy.

Now in the beginning of this phase we may be confused. But an experienced director will help to reveal the hand of God that is detaching us from everything. (The director should reassure a soul; lest, thinking that God's disappearance means that He has forsaken it, the soul lose all hope and give up prayer.) God works even through means of support like this; for then the soul realises deeply how much its life depends upon God. This is a pure dependence. It is living starkly in the present moment. It is sheer abandonment.

3.—The Excellence of Abandonment.

What is there to say of a state in which we cast ourself completely upon God? Saints and holy people are proof of its excellence; and we know the statement of Saint Augustine: 'Abandonment is the choicest fruit of love.' There can be no greater gift to God than that of ourself, delivered over to Him so that He may do with us whatever He wishes.

Mgr. Gay has written a marvellous chapter on abandonment:[1] The soul is a *living Amen,* desiring only to know the Divine Will; and knowing It, desiring only to accomplish It. And Dom Lehodey, who surpasses himself in his last work, *Le saint Abandon,* was convinced of this doctrine, regarding it as the final key for souls

[1] Gay, *Vie et vertus chrétiennes,* T. II, 381.

seeking perfection. After having cited the many saints who acclaimed and advocated abandonment, Dom Lehodey concluded his book with a lew lines from which we have made the following extract :

'Holy abandonment grants us utter detachment, divine love and every virtue, each in a perfect measure of power and gentleness. It is a sweet chain of iron by which our will is bound with God's in an intimate union of love, confidence and humility. The way of abandonment is the secret of a free soul, a tranquil mind and a joyous heart of peace. It is a delightful repose in the Lord; but even above that, it is the artist of sanctity, its medium, the highest virtues. Obediently we give to it our hand, and it guides us, never faltering in the pathways of perfection, preparing us for a happy death and leading us in giant strides up among the summits of Paradise. Holy abandonment is the ideal of the interior life.'[1]

Father de Caussade sets forth the teaching in rare, simple clarity. The second volume of his book contains letters written to souls who are in precisely the same states of prayer that we have attempted to describe. And so we have included an appendix containing certain passages that should further our comprehension of what can sometimes be an elusive doctrine; for the grace of abandonment adapts itself in a different manner to each one of us.

All these authors reach the same conclusion: holy abandonment gives such glory to God and is so salutary for our soul that we must do no other thing but persevere in it with patience and confidence.

1 Lehodey, *Le saint Abandon,* 519.

4.— God's Action Within a Soul Persevering in the State of Abandonment.

The Holy Ghost does great things in a soul of generous faith and perseverance. In true mystical contemplation the soul is *habitually* aware of the inner working of the Holy Spirit. Now except for an occasional, passing moment, there is no such reassuring grace in the state of abandonment; instead we are obliged to wait to see the results of this hidden, heavenly work. And so it happens that in the midst of constant purification we notice our indifference to the many details of life; and looking again, the amount and quality of this *detachment* will astonish us, for it has come about quite without our knowing it. Then we are no longer so fearful of crosses, humiliations and trials; we begin to understand the immense good they do, and we begin to hope for them and love them. Here is tangible demonstration of the mysterious working of the Holy Ghost. Such progress is encouraging.

Now as our soul finds emptiness and increasing distaste in what is not God or for God, it is being drawn carefully inward. Then it may become aware of another gift-in-development, a certain *interior stillness* which the presence of God confirms and increases in us. Without doubt our soul has impulses to tender words of kindness and loving recognition; for our heart is filled with them. But above these feelings there is a genuine desire for silence; almost an inability to speak; though we could speak if it were absolutely necessary. We take no risk of losing Him, however, and remain in our silence. And even when we have something to ask, we know that He knows everything, and so we hesitate. Could we be seeking some kind of satisfaction? We renounce the desire and remain in silence. This is a mystery of interior stillness, a great and deep-

pervading adoration. And we are confident in the grace of abandonment. Is not this adoring God in spirit and truth ?

The Holy Ghost may give us *lights,* also, in the course of the Liturgy, for example, or Psalms, at reading or during the Gospel. A passage we have seen a hundred times will suddenly dawn on us, or flash in an entirely new way upon our mind.

There is difference between a light and the unexpected treasure of wisdom and understanding bestowed in an altogether mystical *touch* by the Spirit. For when we are touched we are penetrated. It may last a minute, or come and go instantaneously; but its first effect is one of amazing sweetness. This gradually diminishes over a span of several days. Our soul is renewed completely by it, and marked in a permanent, ineffable manner. This touch can be the birth of and conversion to a truly interior life.

Following the doctrine of Bossuet, Father de Caussade writes: 'during meditation, or other similar exercises, God can make Himself felt in a moment's purely recollecting touch; after that, detachment becomes less difficult.

'How is it less difficult ?

Our heart is made for God. Once it has tasted Him, however fleetingly, everything else is insipid; once this taste of God has been instilled, it is a secret charm that makes our heart turn to Him, just as a needle, magnetised, cannot help but follow its magnet. God, says Saint Augustine, brings about this second prodigy by filling the soul of goodwill with a sample of Heaven that both surpasses all earthly delight, and implants in the soul a triumphant strength. Now this purity of heart facilitates holy recollection in prayer; and the holy recollection facilitates our purity and detachment. Each develops at such a pace that it is difficult to say which progresses more!

'Can you give examples of this?

'I have heard directors describe the anguish they used to suffer over the slow progress of certain souls; and how after a momentary divine recollection had touched these souls in the course of some spiritual exercise, direction became simple, and not a word thereafter seemed wasted; a transformation had taken place. This happened to Madame de Chantal. While still a lay-woman, she put herself under the holy Bishop of Geneva, whose first instruction was that she should abandon herself to the attraction that he knew was drawing her. 'Mon Dieu!' she cried, 'the minute that was done I experienced a *complete* spiritual change.'

'Do most authors agree upon the wonderful efficacy of these simple, passing touches ?

'Saint John of the Cross mentions their efficacy in a hundred different places, and implies it through all his works. In their spiritual letters, the Venerable Father Louis Lallemant and his two famous disciples, Fathers Rigoleuc and Surin mention souls they knew who felt these touches, and who then made more progress in one month than they had in the preceding ten or fifteen years.'[1]

God touches us when we least expect Him. Perhaps we were discouraged at our lack of progress, when one fine day our soul is practically overwhelmed by His touch. Our gratitude for God's omnipotent mercy is an immediate resolution to further our purification. 'It is up to you ! the purer you are, the more you can taste of Me.' The first touch is a conversion grace; later touches establish that grace. Father Grou has described them: 'Passing touches are the brief announcements of infused prayer. They suppose a truly attentive fidelity, for by them God grants us a visitation. And such a visit, however short, brings

[1] De Caussade, *Bossuet mâitre d'oraison,* 162-163, (new ed. by H Brémond, Bloud et Gay, 1931).

more benefit to the soul than any and all of its own thoughts and affections. We read, we pray, do we not, because we seek to attract God? Now when a certain, secret impress warns us that He is come, let us abide with Him as long as He stays; for He is the One we seek.'[1] And God's intense joy may last in us a day, or even longer if He wills it.

Our soul is not yet in a state of mystical contemplation, for the Gifts of Understanding and Wisdom are still infrequent and comparatively unsubstantial. Then is it habitually under the influence of the Holy Spirit? We could say with M. Maritain[2] that our soul is certainly in the 'mystical progression,' and engaged by the Gifts of Knowledge and Fortitude. So while feeling less consolation, its peace is deep and not easily shaken; our soul is upheld and braced in the virtues, and its generosity is true. We exist in a state of complete detachment, and live in continuous and total abandonment.

5.—Abandonment in Loving Faith.

For the most part, our life of prayer is a life of faith. And *fides per caritatem operatur,* Saint Paul says, 'faith worketh by charity.'[3] Now love of God is not supposed to engender the very essence of faith, but rather to perfect it through its activity; therefore, in regard to revealed truths, the 'knowledge of faith that loves' is quite different from speculative knowledge. 'The true taste of God has a pronounced effect upon every act of faith made by the soul,' says one of Saint Thomas' commentators.[4] And 'Charity gives an unusual increase to the visual power

[1] Grou: *Maximes spirituelles,* p. 131.
[2] Cf, *Vie spirituelle,* March, 1923, M. Maritain's letter, dated January 23, 1923.
[3] Galatians, V, 6.
[4] Fr. Bernard, O.P., *Revue des Jeunes,* IIa, Hac, Q. 4, a. 3, sol. 2, note 81.

and acuity of the intellect that is enlightened by faith.' Living faith informed by charity that is as effective as possible, is the basis of our life of prayer. And as courageously as we persevere, we shall be established in a state of abandonment by love and faith, while outwardly our life will be quite normal. The more spiritual our love the less we shall feel it. Thus in love and stillness of faith we pray, hopeful, knowing that great perfection is possible.

'Real faith,' Father de Foucauld writes, 'faith inspiring every action, supernatural faith that tears away the world's mask, faith that reveals God in everything, that shows how utterances of fear, restlessness and danger make no sense at all, faith that walks ahead in calm and peace, in the deep happiness of a little one whose hand is in its mother's; faith settling the soul in such a final detachment that things of the senses are known at once for their nothingness and triviality the faith whose prayer is as confident as a child's just request of its father; the kind of faith revealing that 'outside of doing what is agreeable to God, all is illusion'; the faith of vision, the vision of faith ... ; faith to see in the one glance both God's immensity and our littleness; a faith that undertakes anything God desires, with no hesitation, no shame, no fear, no withdrawal. Oh ! where is this rarity of faith? My God, give it to me ! My God, I want faith, I want love. In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg it of You. Amen'1.

'Faith and love. These are the two foundations of Father de Foucauld's spiritual life. As they became continuous, his life became an uninterrupted state of contemplation. What else is there but beholding and loving? Beholding Jesus and loving His will. And truly

1 De Foucauld, *Ecrits spirituels,* 38-39.

the grace of his great desire was granted: 'that there might nevermore be any difference between me and the accomplishment of Your will'1

Here is a superb example of the state of abandonment to which perseverance in the prayer can lead us. This state is the realisation of the double goal of prayer; uninterrupted, loving contemplation by a soul that is ever attentive to the slightest detail of the divine will. Is not this what God desires ? And of the hundredfold promised by Jesus to those who have abandoned everything in order to follow Him, we say, God never fails us.

We say it and proclaim it ! In every single state we have discussed, our soul possesses its hundredfold. Whether we are drawn by God, or are persevering in 'obscurity' or 'vagueness', or are in the simple prayer or faith, He gives us His hundredfold. Oh what goodness it is to love God and give ourself to Him ! The lower part of our soul may suffer sometimes, and perseverance may seem difficult, but always there is an underlying peace and union with God, for our soul is in a state of perfect balance. Its life is one of happiness and confidence. *Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico gaudete.* 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice'2.

NOTE

Let us remark here that every soul does not pass through the stages we have tried to represent. From the very outset there are some who cannot ever seem to find themselves in any degree—from simple meditation to the prayer of simplicity—and they envy others who are led along the normal ways. Despite great effort, even alternatives are unproductive; for these then, there is nothing, not even

1 J. Dermine, *La vie tpirituelle du P. de Foucauld,* 111-112.
3 Philippians, IV, 4.

consolation. And not having travelled the ordinary well-mapped route, they have no idea of where they are.

Their generosity needs a director's reassurance; it is not easy for these souls, especially in the beginning. But if they persevere, even as ones ignorant of the ascent, they will arrive at the prayer of faith: lovingly attentive to God, communing with Him continually, trusting Him and humbled in the uncertainty of their way. Some of these souls are God's powerful instruments; but He leaves them unknown to others and even to themselves. Often they need vocal prayers, beads and reading as protection against vagueness. They are true contemplatives, but never taken into our Good God's fullness of silence. Nevertheless they are in a state of oblation; ever united to Him by their prayers, by their attentive submission and by their absolute love for His Good Pleasure.

CONCLUSION.

In this exposition of the degrees of ordinary prayer, it has been our aim to make it clear that each one of us can realise in his own life the precept of Our Lord: 'We ought always to pray and not to lose heart'1. *Vigilate itaque omni tempore orantes.* 'Watch ye therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of man'2. And each of us will discover anew the essence of prayer: how our own mind and will must act, and how God's co-operating activity is to increase as our prayer advances. This clear, we mention once more the time-tested rule: the best prayer is the prayer that succeeds; it is the prayer that suits us in the present moment, *hic et nunc.* As long as we are faithful to our grace, it does not matter whether the prayer is

1 Luke, XVIII, 1.
» Luke, XXI, 36.

simple, affective, discursive, or one of the alternate forms. But let us beware any pride of soul that will not relinquish the prayer of simplicity, tempting us perhaps, to try to cling to it by our efforts alone. No matter what our state, if it is clear that God wishes to leave us alone, then let us have courage and humility enough to return to lower degrees of prayer.

We know there are certain humble souls who are sure that they pray vocally, yet who are really in a very high state of prayer. We remember ''M. de Meaux' Teresan, account of the widow who used to spend hours saying a few *Paters,* and whose intervals were pure contemplation. But she was unaware of it. And what country hamlet does not have certain innocent, virtuous souls who know just a few prayers; and who have never been able to do anything but recite them slowly, resting now and then in the presence of God, remaining hours in the church in sweetness and peace, edifying all by their modest, respectful attention.

'Ask them what they say to God, and tearfully they will tell you that they are not able to pray, that they have never learned. Good Lord ! What do they do, then ? What speH binds them ? It would take almost a miracle to stir them out of their reverent peace. Think what you please, I am convinced and shall say it straight out: they are in the prayer of faith, present to God and simply praying with their heart. How many learned men can do this? How many learned men will never do it, says M. de Meaux, unless they become humble and turn their hearts to God. . ,''[1]

So as ever, we come back to humility. And humility is not a matter of seeking a higher degree of prayer; it is a matter of seeking God truly, and persevering in that quest. Then the peace of abandonment will come upon us. But this peace is never given finally. Peace, like happiness, is a

1 De Caussade, *Tïossuet maître d'oraison,* 190-191.

reward of conquest: and God lets us keep it for just as long as we strive to live with Him. If there are so few souls of prayer it is because so very many lose heart along the way. In humble perseverance we can be absolutely confident that God will hear our prayer in His own manner. Jesus is saying to us: 'Ask, and it shall be given you: seek and you shall find.' *Et ego dico vobis: petite et dabitur vobis, quaerite et invenietis.*[1]

APPENDIX.

This appendix contains extracts from the correspondence of Father de Caussade. They have been selected first, to fortify our perseverance in the prayer of simplicity; and second, to confirm the practical application of our instruction in all the degrees of ordinary prayer. The doctrine of abandonment was presented by Father de Caussade with the varied shading and emphasis necessary for each one of a collection of generous souls who were being obscurely drawn by God. And despite their trials, these souls possessed remarkable sensitivity of conscience.

I. 'My dear sister, do not regret the attraction and sweetness God gave you and then took away. There were a thousand imperfections in it; as a matter of fact, your regret proves that the consolations were sensible and strongly pleasing to nature. Nature loves to see, know and feel; and the more natural any state is, the less well it satisfies the demands of divine love. And so God detaches a soul with urgency when He finds it especially faithful to His grace. If He did not subject us to paternal rigour this way, we should always be weak, in continual faults and unable to defend ourselves against the seducing illusions of self-love. The soul that has not been enlightened and freed by trial is usually in a state of unbroken, unconscious

[1] Luke, XI, 9.

self-contemplation; its contentment and peace depend upon the most unstable things in the world: feelings. If it is attached to God, it is not for His sake as much as for the attendant consolation; this soul's supposed possession of spiritual riches is the basis of its vain self-estimation. May God preserve it from idolatry ! But even if it should escape such criminal excess, there is still the danger of this soul's remaining full of self and empty of God.

'Rather than risk so frightful a misfortune, God visits the souls of His loving predilection with every kind of trial; they are stricken, humbled, annihilated in their own eyes. But how superabundantly He rewards those who have remained faithful to Him out of the midst of their trials and privations ! For after our spiritual fortune has been destroyed absolutely and we are worth nothing, we suddenly realise that vanity, presumption and self-esteem are gone too; and that we are filled urith self-distrust, humility, confidence in God and love of Him. Now this love is pure because self-love has no longer any satisfying feelings, nothing left to cling to, nothing else to corrupt. So it is that I value your present state of poverty more than all those beautiful emotions of the past that seemed perfectly pure to you. It was self-love then, and in its most delicious, secret pasture.

II. 'Sometimes it seems as if one is without faith, hope, charity, religion, virtue—as if one had lost all knowledge of God. This happens when it is His pleasure to remove every trace of taste, sweetness and feeling from these virtues, spiritualising their existence, making the soul's progress one of pure faith. This is how to serve and adore God in spirit and truth, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman. Such a state is far removed from the senses. It is very precious, high, purified and solid. They

are the delights of the spirit that we taste there; but we must give up all sensual, earthly pleasures for them. We have far to travel in order to reach this state of pure light. However it is a state where there is lasting peace—a state when one's soul is established in God; and one feels there just what you feel. I mean the deeply hidden strength of God's indwelling depth. And although imperceptible, that strength renders a soul more truly strong than it ever was in the times when it was sure it could have endured martyrdom. So, remain in your peace and bless God.

III. 'As for all these acts of oblation and resignation, beginners must make them, it is true, for they need to form good habits; but in your present state your heart should do all that; in fact it does it unconsciously. Do you think God needs express, formal acts to know your hidden intentions? When an intention of self-love, pride or human respect glides secretly into a good deed, far from making a formal act of it, we strive to bury the perverse thing within ourselves, so convinced are we that God can see it and could punish it. How then can our good intentions remain hidden from Him? Or do you seriously imagine that His degree of punishment could be greater than His degree of reward?

IV. 'These wandering thoughts are God's own trial for you. This is your suffering and humiliation, your exercise in patience and merit; and the amount of pain you are experiencing indicates how mightily you must long for God to be your lasting occupation. Now God sees this desire, and desires are the same as acts with Him. Be patient and humble, and suffer your mind's involuntary wandering; take good care that you do not worry over them or restlessly try to find their source; God would

punish such utter self-loving curiosity with even greater darkness. Remember Saint Teresa's advice on this matter: Let us not worry about the mill-clapper's noise so long as the mill gives us flour. Her mill-clapper is a distracted, wandering mind, and the mill turning out flour is a will tending toward God. Our especial desire then, is for our will to be fixed in God. Have you ever considered what goes on in a worldly woman's heart when she hears a fine sermon? Obviously the mind and imagination have a hundred good thoughts, but it is the object of her passion that masters her will and heart. Is she any the holier, then?

It is quite the contrary with you; there is no need to be upset. What do you think is the significance of your peace and tranquillity in the midst of these incursions, pains and torment; and your distaste for talking about them? This is a great gift of God; His own blessed peace has sealed your heart so delicately. Now be tranquil, totally abandoned to God, and do not bother about how you are making your acts. The present stirrings in your heart are God's; they are the undiscernible movements of His fancy.

V. T am not surprised at this emptiness and fatigue you experience after straining to multiply your interior acts. You are simply withdrawing yourself from God's operation and substituting one of your own, as if you wanted to anticipate God's grace and do more than He does. Such activity is natural; be content to abide in true peace; act as though you were in a prison with God your captor, and think no more of escape. This is the holy, productive inaction of which the saints speak; it is a time when without any work, extraordinary things are done. Only self-love despairs in this boredom of doing nothing, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, hearing nothing;

but let it suffer as much as it likes; the very boredom and despair will finally rid us of its presence. By cutting off all nourishment we shall starve self-love to death. Oh what a happy death ! I crave it for you as I yearn for it myself, with my whole heart.

VI, 'Your way of being before God, in a simple gaze of faith, bare of images, figures, representations, in total deliverance, is the purest and most perfect relationship one could have with God. It is truly prayer of the heart, the soul's state of oneness with God; and the more this operation is simple, unhampered, invisible and removed from every· feeling, the more is its solidity efficacious, penetrating and sublime, as Blessed Mother de Chantal said'1.

In another letter Father de Caussadc determines the principles that must underlie our holy abandonment.

*Be firm, my dear daughter. No matter what interior shocks you receive, never cease to practise complete abandonment to God. Be perfectly confident in His goodness. Cleave to these two distinct and unchanging principles: first, God cannot ever abandon those who abandon themselves entirely to Him, and who have an unquestioning trust in His infinite mercy; second, not one thing happens in this world that is not ordained by Providence, Providence that turns everything to advantage and to the greatest profit of resigned, docile souls. Contrary-thoughts and interior struggles will serve, if you are faithful, only to re-affirm in your mind and re-root in your heart these truths that are so consoling, these dispos-itions so perfect for your sanctification.....'2

. Your frequent boredom, disgust and dryness are part of the flux through which all souls must pass on their

1 De Caussade, *L'abandon à la Providence divine,* t, II. (Letter V' to Sister Marie-Henriette de Bousmard, 1734), pp. 20-25.
* De Caussade, *L'abandon à la Providence divine,* t, II, p. 13.

way to God. What merit could there be, how should we possibly prove our fidelity to God, if a suffusion of interior grace were to uphold and console us always ? It is essential to be faithful in each of our duties, and in the exterior and interior practices of our state, in dryness and disgust as in sweetness and fervour. Even if each thing we do is at the price of unutterable repugnance, our merit is that much the greater for it. For this is the only way in which our love for God can be separated completely from this wretched love of self that introduces its presence into the heart and substance of all things, according to the teaching of Saint Francis of Sales.

'There is, of course, a sweet, delicious peace at prayer; and it is a lure for self-love. But in the bitter, almost sorrowful dryness that we experience at times, God is freer to do great things in us. So let there be abandonment in this as in all else. Let God act; He knows best what we need. Now we should be fearful of one thing: willingly giving ourselves up to a distraction. And there is one way to avoid this danger: to will precisely what God wills, hour for hour, moment for moment, in everything. That is the shortest, surest, and I daresay only way of perfection. Anything else can be illusion, pride and self-love'[1].

In closing, let us recall Father de Caussade's response to a soul who was 'unable to pray and cut off from God':

'It is to be expected that you are not aware of anything; but the desires hidden in your heart are constant prayers known to God alone.'[2]

And so even in this state we can realise the commandment of Jesus: 'We ought always to pray and not to lose heart.'[3] *Oportet semper orare et non deficere?*

1 De Caussade, *L'abandon à la Providence divine,* t, II, 14-15.
2 De Caussade, *L'abandon à la Providence divine,* t, II, 18.
3 Luke, XVIII, 1.

PART II.

THE

DEGREES OF MYSTICAL PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

After somewhat detailed pages on ordinary prayer, we shall examine its mystical form. Any generous soul, not to mention contemplatives, desiring to advance to union with God, will understand the wisdom and necessity of making this study. For *ignorance,* of course, is our real *danger.* And it is to be regretted that many people have misunderstood the nature of mystical graces.

There are some *'robust spirits'* who see, or wish to see nothing but extraordinary sensible phenomena in the mystical forms of prayer; their first reaction is to suspect an over-developed, morbid imagination. They forget, or perhaps do not know that such phenomena are accessory and only accidental to mysticism. What is essential is hidden; it is the deep and mysterious action whereby God transforms a soul and deifies it.

'Less experienced' souls imagine themselves in high paths of holiness if they are granted the slightest sweetness or facility in prayer. When someone tries to disenchant them they believe themselves to be misunderstood; and their director's prudent counsels are taken as the humiliations always heaped upon mystics. Souls like these seem to be unaware that the states we are speaking of are quite different from the introductory graces they know; they overlook the preliminary requirement of passage through a desert of passively-borne, painful and grievous purification.

And there are the *'timid'* ones, telling us that these graces 'are reserved for great souls, never for little ones.' They too are forgetful, forgetting that God withholds His graces from those reputed to be sage and proud, to give His measure to the lowly and the humble.

Reasoning cannot do much with errors of this kind; we believe that the best results are achieved by clear, brief exposition. We shall treat of *mystical contemplation that is general and obscure,* excluding both distinct mental contemplation and secondary effects like corporal phenomena. Now mystical contemplation is a grace of union with God. Sometimes it happens to be accompanied by such phenomena as visions, revelations, locutions, etc. . . . ; but according to all authors, no connection is necessary. Saint John of the Cross makes it very plain that asking for or desiring such gifts is an invitation to illusion. And many of the saints confessed that they were at times uncertain as to whether or not they were victims of the devil's deceits or of their own imaginative reveries.[1]

One of the characteristics of Benedictine and Cistercian mysticism is the absence of exterior phenomena. Dom Butler describes it: 'purely spiritual, as simple as it is high; clean, clear of anything diabolical . .. the health of body, mind and soul.'[2]

After this clarification, let us go on to our study of mysticism. We shall be guided by saints and masters, and in some degree by experience gained from contact with certain souls favoured by grace whom we have had the fortune to know. Let us be guided by them, delivering ourself over to God in confident, generous prayer; so that, purified and deified by Him, we may live ever more for His glory and for the salvation of many souls !

[1] Cf. Lehodey, *Les Voies de I'Oraison mentale,* 403.
[*] Butler, *Le Monachisme bénédictin,* 97, (de Gigord, 1924).

IX.—FROM ORDINARY TO MYSTICAL PRAYER

i.—Mystical Prayer and Perfection.

We are all called to perfection. This fact is undisputed; it means that we must pray, pray much and pray always. But does it mean that we are all called to mystical prayer? The question is very delicate.

M. Maritain has clarified it somewhat by distinguishing between mystical life and infused contemplation. Tf a soul's constant docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost were not increasing so that its whole interior life was coming habitually to be under the influence of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, then the soul would be outside the normal way of sanctification and would not ever attain to holiness.'[1] But the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are several. Understanding and Wisdom will dispose some souls for infused contemplation, while others may be especially gifted in Counsel, Fortitude or Piety. 'It is always the same Spirit acting under diverse forms; multiform, yet all equally good and profound.'[2] After very sensitive consideration, Father de Guibert concludes, 'Infused contemplation is not, then, an abnormal, or even in a sense, an extraordinary way of sanctification; and yet though perfectly normal, it is not the *only* normal way of sanctification: neither souls enjoying it nor those who do not are outside normal development in the spiritual life.'[3]

We shall turn to Saint Teresa of Avila. And granting some differences of interpretation, her texts would appear

[1] De Guibert, *Etudes de Théologie Mystique,* 212, (Toulouse, 1930)
[2] De Guibert, *Etudes de Théologie Mystique,* 177, (Toulouse, 1930).
[3] De Guibert, *Etudes de Théologie Mystique,* 212, (Toulouse, 1930).

plainly to affirm that there are different ways by which God engages a soul in the path of perfection. As demonstration how the fountain of living water symbolising mystical graces and the 'way of perfection' are correlated, the Carmelite reformist devotes two chapters of her work. "God does not lead all souls by the same path;"[1] Repeatedly she mentions 'a short-cut', 'another way', that is 'more direct' as also leading to sanctity. 'Saint Martha was a saint, though she is not called a contemplative.'[1] Do these statements not make it clear that there are two pathways to perfection: that of ordinary prayer and that of mystical contemplation ?

But why God conducts one soul one way and the next soul the other way is a mystery. Saint John of the Cross remarks, 'not all those who consciously walk in the way of the spirit arc brought by God to contemplation, nor even the half of them—why, He best knows.'[3] But the goal is what matters; it is up to us to enter into the usual way open to all; and if it should be God's will, He will guide us to perfection by the more direct, mystical way. Until our dying hour we shall not know whether or not this is His plan for us. But if we are ready always, in confidence and humility, God will see that we attain the degree of perfection that He wishes for us, in His plan.

'In our own day, as in ages past, experience shows that God has ever the same loving heart and liberal hand, and that He has reserved to Himself certain souls amongst us whom He is pleased to favour with His choicest gifts. Happy are those who are understood, tried, encouraged

1 Saint Teresa, *Chemin de. la Perfection,* XVIII and XIX (Mercier Press)
2 Saint Teresa, *The Way of Perfection,* ch, XIX, (Mercier Press). Cf. Gabriel de Sainte Marie-Madeleine, O.C.D., *.Sainte Thérèse de Jésus, Maîtresse de la vie spirituelle,* 43 and following.
3 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. IX, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)

and wisely directed ! Happy too, the directors who know how to discern the action of God, and to make it bring forth all the fruits of holiness that it promises'[1] ! Without a doubt mystical graces would be more frequent if so many souls were not to give up. And such graces would be 'lavished with a more royal profusion upon souls who have left all for God, if they only knew better how to appreciate them and to dispose themselves for receiving them.'[2]

2.—The Excellence of this Prayer.

Perhaps we may be permitted to second Saint Teresa's statement that perfection is possible without the favour of mystical graces. In fact she was sure not only that one could be perfect, but that one would even exceed in merit those contemplative souls who were not being faithful in all that was required of them. But nevertheless, it is true that infused contemplation is an astonishingly effective short-cut. Only God can introduce us to it. And out of all the Christian holy practices, there is not one nearly as efficacious for detaching souls from the earth and uniting them to God. 'It is the school of high virtue, the short-cut to perfection, and the most rapid conveyance to this goal, a pearl of priceless value, a treasure so desirable that a wise merchant will not hesitate to sell all his goods in order to obtain it'[3].

Let us reject then, any prejudices that might make us dread mystical prayer as if it were some kind of scare-crow keeping us from the realisation of its true value. God wishes His gifts to be appreciated; will He ever give them to those who scorn them[4] ?

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 234.
2 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 234-235.
3 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 227-228.
4 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 228-229.

3.—Our Disposition.

Inasmuch as these graces are so precious, it is reasonable that all Christians, particularly contemplative religious, would desire them. On the other hand, they are the gift of God, freely given. How should we dispose ourself, is any special exercise necessary? There is nothing in particular for us to do, no special apprenticeship for mystical prayer. But we do prepare by our humble generosity on the way of Christian perfection. This is the preparation we have implied and mentioned explicitly in past treatment of the interior life and prayer.[1] This is a way of life in stillness and recollection, in prayerful self-denial; it requires a wise director who guides us more and more into the Holy Spirit, Whom we desire to possess alone; and Whom we follow, docile in difficulty and unselfish in our peace and joy. If this, then, is our disposition, God can guide us to the exact perfection of His will.

4.—Transition: Ordinary to Mystical Prayer.

Higher mystical degrees are rarely encountered; and so when we come to deal with them we shall be brief. But this present transition, and its initial stages especially, require care and detail in description. It is very important to realise when a soul is entering a special or passive way; for an error in discernment could have regrettable consequences. We shall begin by examining and comparing these two kinds of prayer.

Ordinary Prayer, at its highest level, is love's simple dwelling upon God; it is a state of awareness attained by ordinary grace, almost by its own volition. That is why it is called acquired contemplation.

[1] Cf. Bélorgey, *Sous le regard de Dieu,* 65-66, 121-148, (Lyon, 1944); *La Pratique de l'Oraison mentale,* T. I, 77-90.

Mystical Prayer also, is love's simple dwelling upon God; but it is composed of a kind of ineffable love and knowledge of God. And normally the soul feels the presence of God as though in its very centre.

Without mentioning the new manner of realising God's presence, let us appreciate now that this ineffable way of knowing and loving God is the fruit of the action of Understanding and Wisdom, Gifts of the Holy Ghost. And we know as a fact that God, and not the soul, initiates these Gifts. Now this means that infused contemplation is present. It is clearly supernatural. We could even call it passive prayer, since the soul does not act as much as it is 'acted upon'. Now', however simple and effortless ordinary prayer may seem, the soul's loving knowledge is primarily of human origin; God lends His assistance. But in mystical prayer the soul knows and loves Him super-humanly; and this is a result of God's special action, to which the soul can only lend itself.

This transition from the human to the 'supra-human' mode of knowing and loving is a painfully difficult thing. Saint John of the Cross describes it in his Nights.

5.—A Description of the Nights.

In the degrees of ordinary prayer we saw how the working of intellect and w'ill became gradually simpler as divine grace increased; and at the highest, most simplified degree, there is an impression of knowing and loving God without any effort. It seems deceptively like extraordinary prayer. Yet it is nothing, as the soul will easily recognise later should God call it and introduce it into the true mystical way. Now in this last stage the soul will not be aided by God in His former manner; instead He will begin to give it a new kind of loving knowledge. It is precisely this action that brings chaos into the soul. Not

comprehending God, nor taking account of His work, the soul struggles, striving to retain possession of its customary loving awareness. It does this, instead of adapting itself to the new mode of knowing and loving Him.

Yet even studying this adaptation beforehand would be of no help. For if an instantaneous mystical touch allows us no time for resistance, dazzling the soul by surprise, what happens when this state continues and becomes habitual? The soul is hardly able to function. Gradually, and after a time of experience, the soul will understand God's desire for it to renounce its own way of knowing and loving Him. Then it will be taught and formed by God alone; and its suffering will not cease until every resistance to His divine action has disappeared. This is a period of thorough purification for the soul.

In the first Night the senses learn to submit to the spirit; and as we shall describe, the spirit submits to God in the course of the second Night.

God remains absolute master of His gifts. He lavishes them on whom He wills, when He wills and as He wills. To some souls He may grant a temporary state of quietude before the passive purgations commence. And the purification itself may be brief, or intense and enduring as God wishes. Can He not telescope a lasting Purgatory into an instant? But ordinarily the Night of the Senses precedes quietude; its length and severity foreshadow the height and sanctity of the mystical graces reserved for the soul.

X.—THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES.

i.—Elements.

In the purification of the lower part of the soul, the senses must submit to the spirit. Essentially an infused state, it is the 'beginning of a contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses; which contemplation is secret and hidden from the very person that experiences it'1. The purifying pain is secondary. God binds the soul's 'interior faculties; and allows it not to cling to the understanding, nor to have delight in the will, nor to reason with the memory'2.

In Tanquerey's summation, 'It is a complex state of soul, a bewildering mixture of darkness and light, of dryness and intense yet unseen love of God, of real powerlessness and hidden energy. Analysis yields apparent contradiction'3.

Having said this, and mindful of the last remark in the previous chapter, we shall write of certain representative souls we have known.

2.—Concrete Cases.

There was a convert whose sole devotion was the Blessed Virgin. He knew nothing about the spiritual life as such; it was she who brought him to God and then to the monastery. Now after a period of difficulties, doubt,

1 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. IX (Peerstr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)

* Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. IX (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)

• Tanquerey, *Precis d'ascétique et mystique,* n. 1,421.

hesitation, resistance, Jesus drew him more and more and Mary seemed to depart and hide herself; though she returned sometimes, bringing peace or aid in his aridity, helping him to re-find Jesus. Soon he enjoyed converse of the heart and the beautiful prayer of simplicity. Jesus became everything for this religious. The Tabernacle was the centre of his monastery, attracting him no matter where he was. He left it with difficulty; and every possible moment was spent there in sweet or arid contemplation.

But no one can escape the law of change. It was before the Tabernacle, with everything going particularly well, that he began to be aware of a formless, obscure presence of God. It grew, distracting him and interfering with the unique conception of Jesus that he cherished so greatly. Tormented, he told the trouble to his Father Master who advised him very simply[1] to fend off the other thought and try to remain with Jesus alone.

But it was impossible. And Jesus was veiled away from him increasingly, until He was gone altogether. Now he had neither Jesus nor Mary, only this awareness, this presence pressing in upon him, never sweet and always more demanding. It was hostile to distraction and to spiritual occupations alike. If the religious let himself go, the recall was swift and unmistakable: 'Remember God!' Then at last the soul threw itself to This that was drawing it so terribly. But there was nothing to be found or to hold, not the slightest thing to feel! And this poor soul thought back to the days of the sweet delights of Jesus and Mary.

There seemed no explanation. God drew the soul, yet repulsed it. What was wrong? Why was the soul unwanted? But whatever the cause of the trouble, the director's

[1] The results of such advice would permit a director to ascertain whether this was a special grace from God, or just imagination.

words were only temporary relief; the anguish always returned and seemed to redouble. This state endured for months, torturing the soul and exhausting the body. And its pain was the greater for all the temptations that hounded and slashed at it.

Finally, exasperation came. The soul found God's conduct hard, even cruel. It felt stirrings of revolt, and had to force itself to pray to the 'Good God'. But any real connection between these two words would have been unthinkable. It could hardly bear the sight of the Tabernacle without surgings of hatred or blasphemy, or perhaps perverse satisfaction remembering Voltaire and Renan . . . ,men who wrote against God.

Now it happened on several occasions that Mary came, even during this period of intense aversion. She came in hidden consolation and comfort. And the poor soul said: 'You, You are good. You!' repeating and accentuating 'You', saying it over and over, that word alone and, nothing else ! ! !

So despite all the sufferings and temptations, the soul would not willingly offend God in anything. The centre of this soul is holy abandonment; and if God willed for it to remain desolated, it would respond in obedience and relief and love. Even hearing about abandonment to divine Providence, or reading such pages as have been cited[1], afford momentary respite to this soul. But the state continues uninterrupted, night and day, endangering health, making duties onerous and study almost impossible.

How deeply does this religious now realise his nothingness ! He has the strongest and most painful impression that the whole community regards him as an object of pity. He cannot imagine how they stand him. The thought of being dismissed occurs to him, yet he is

[1] This work, pp. 81—82.

not really concerned. A grand indifference to things is growing in him; he seems to know nothing anymore; his abandonment is close to being total, as if without beginning or end. At last he possesses the heart of the psalmist's words, reproduced in the sixth and seventh degrees of humility by Saint Benedict: *Ad nihilum redactus sum et nescivi, ut jumentum factus sum apud Tej*I am brought to nothing and I knew not. I am become as a beast before Thee'1; —*Ego autem sum . . . opprobrium hominum at abjectio plebis.* 'I am . . . the reproach of men and the outcast of the people'2. It is in this state of ever broadening abandonment that the soul is subdued and pacified. When it has lost everything, God will reveal and give Himself, as we shall try to show later.

Now let us sketch the other concrete case, also that of a religious, a young, fervent priest who was in this state of purgation; though submissive, he still found the divine hand heavy, God's ways unsearchable and his experience not utterly unlike that of the holy man, Job.

'What is God's will? Let Him only make it clear and I shall do it! But why does He draw me and drive me off at the same time? It's intolerable! I can't even see or hear His name without running to Him; but then He vanishes. He's untouchable. No, it wasn't like this before. He just doesn't want me, *now* ! What frustration . . . like giving food to a starving man and then taking it away from him ! And what good is any comfort or relaxation if He is here every second: 'Remember God! Remember God!'

Admiring the work of God's grace the director listened to the words spoken with such plaintive resignation.

'By the way, what are you reading now?'

1 Psalm, LXXIT, 22-23.
2 Psalm, XXI, 7.

'A life of the Curé of Ars.'

'What part?' the director asked.

'The chapter on the devil, Thank Goodness!'

The 'thank goodness' was really a way of saying 'at least that gets me aw'ay from God and gives me *some* relief.' The director could not conceal a smile; and putting his hand out to the young religious who w'as trying to smile, too, despite his sorrows he said, 'My dear child, God loves you very much. You will see it all later. But for the present be at peace. All goes well. Keep confident no matter what happens.' The young religious went out, relieved and comforted ... for a little while.

These few concrete details give us an idea of what the soul endures in the Night of the Senses. They also help us to understand the 'passive state'. Now the activity in this state is intensive; God is liberating the soul, but the soul cannot stand liberation. In its first ignorance it withstands Him, learning to co-operate only by degrees. Out of rebelliousness comes an increasing passivity as the soul undergoes this imposed, divine operation.

One should be positive of the presence of this special action of God, before revealing to a soul that it is in the passive way, the Night of the Senses in this case. There is a danger: if God's mystical operation is not really present and the soul conducts itself passively, it will fall into vagueness and subsequent relaxation; on the other hand, if a soul has been taken into the Night and is then obliged to return to former degrees of prayer, much suffering will ensue; as God makes no provision for such an active line of conduct in this state. Many souls have given up prayer and the whole way of perfection as a result of errors in direction.

Now our discussion does not pretend to be inclusive. The details of the Night vary as do places and people.

We wish merely do determine its general characteristics.

3.—Essential Elements.

In regard to the first Night, Saint John of the Cross notes the three elements that spiritual authors after him have maintained. We are taking the liberty of dividing the 'grievous and habitual awareness' of God into two parts, in order to cast more light on its practical aspect.

The *habitual awareness* of God is characterised not only by inescapable aridity, but also by the way in which it seems to come in upon the soul and persist in an indistinct and obscure, but very real manner. It is unbidden, and perhaps its unexpectedness is what shocks the soul so much; it simply arrives, and the soul has neither sought it nor thought about it. 'God is not represented to the soul under any form; no words can convey the idea that it forms of Him; He is not conceived precisely as great, nor as beautiful, nor as good, nor as powerful; its idea of Him is not this, and yet it is all this; or better still, it is something above all this. God, God, God, is the only word the soul can utter to express its thoughts about Him'.[1]

Th other part of this first element is a compelling and *grievous need for more* intimate union with God. 'It is like a nostalgia for God who cannot be found, an unas^ suaged thirst that cannot do without Him; the soul would like to be inflamed with divine love, and above all, to possess God; merely to love Him is no longer enough, it must have union'[2].

The second element proper is a *powerlessness of the mind* in prayer. The mind is as if bound; its imagination will not move, its memory is blurred and it seems empty of understanding. At times this emptiness cannot even

[1] Saudreon, *Vie d'union,* ch. VIII, 3, n. 336.
[*] Lehodey, *Les Voies de ГOraison mentale,* 260.

comprehend a book. At best the soul tries to correspond in some fashion with the obscure and indistinct awareness of God that is always present. Its aridity continues as usual. But outside of prayer there is little trouble carrying on with one's duties; though sometimes study is difficult.

Absolute aridity in the sensible faculties is the last essential element. The soul 'finds no pleasure or consolation in the things of God, it also fails to find it in anything created; for . . . God sets the soul in this dark night to the end that He may quench and purge its sensual desire'1. 'Hence comes that aridity in prayer; God no longer smiles, the heart is devoid of all enthusiasm, the imagination no longer helps at all, but impedes and distracts. All is gloomy desert and desolation. Weariness weighs the soul down in the practice of virtue: it is plunged in bitterness, sacrifice terrifies, a mere nothing makes it suffer, temptation is more than ever burdensome. It feels a distaste for all created things; it experiences no liking for anything, 'without being able to think of any particular thing or having the desire to do so2; the soul cherishes only one attraction, God'3. It seeks "Him alone and finds this weaning bitter and insufferable.

4.—The Sufferings of the Night.

'We must not exaggerate them,' remarks Dom Lehodey, whom we shall follow closely on this subject4. 'Authors have mainly depicted what took place in the souls of certain saints,' whom God tries more severely than weaker souls. 'However the trials are real. Saint Teresa, who had

1 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. IX, Peers tr, (Burns Oates & Washboume)
* Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. IX, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)
1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 256.
* Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 265-272.

experienced them over a number of years, declares that they are very great and painful. We can distinguish that essential suffering that occurs in every soul's Night from accidental or secondary sufferings that vary in each case.

Essential Suffering.

God is the cause, in the sense that this suffering derives from His action upon us. 'The soul suffers on account of the good things it has lost. It was not thus it used to pray formerly; holy thoughts abounded, affection welled up as from a fountain; it used to feel what it was saying to God; God used lovingly to show Himself and was unsparing in His caresses; it could have spent nights and days in prayer; penances had a charm for the soul; no demand would have been too much in the service of so good a Master. Can it be that He is angry now?

'It suffers from persistent dryness, God is silent and prayer is full of weariness and ennui. The soul suffers also from this obscure sense of need, from this indistinct love that bears it towards God yet causes such indefinable unhappiness; for the soul, feeling itself empty and cold, believes it is travelling towards perdition rather than towards mystical union.

'During the time, then, of the aridities of this night of sense, spiritual persons suffer great trials, by reason not so much of the aridities which they suffer, as of the fear which they have of being lost on the road, thinking that all spiritual blessing is over for them and that God has abandoned them since they find no help or pleasure in good things'[1].

'Profoundly wearisome, even when of short duration, this state may be prolonged for years; the soul sees nothing

[1] Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. X (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)

ahead but an endless desert that is monotonous, bleak, desolate and dreadful. These various pains belong to the very substance itself of the passive purgation; they are the normal consequence of this dry kind of contemplation. But mingled with these pains there are often violent temptations, maladies and other trials, which, without being a necessary feature of it, complete the passive purgation of the soul'1.

Secondary Suffering.

Some complementary suffering can be the devil's work: temptations against faith, hope, holy virtue. Our patience is severely tried. Sometimes we are inclined to discontent, blasphemy, restlessness and doubts that lead us in one way or another to discouragement. And suffering often comes from superiors' misunderstanding or inability to help us in any way; it can come from our brethren or from ourself. We feel helpless, stupid, hopeless. And sickness, infirmity or fatigue, or any one of a multitude of crosses play their part, too. 'Sometimes these troubles have nothing extraordinary about them.' But they deepen the dimension of our suffering. 'Sometimes they are manifestly due to the special intervention of God; but these secondary trials are effectively adopted into the purgation by the way in which they aid to detach the soul from all things, almost compelling it in sheer desperation to throw itself into the arms of God. Still we must not think that every soul has to pass through these secondary sufferings. They are distributed according to the purification each soul needs, and according to the state of sanctity to which God calls it'2.

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 266-269.

2 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 269-272.

5.—Duration and Intensity of the Trials.

Saint John of the Cross writes, 'For how long a time the soul will be held in this fasting and this penance of sense, cannot be told with any certainty. . . . For this is meted out by the will of God, in conformity with the greater or the smaller degree of imperfection which each soul has to purge away. In conformity, likewise, with the degree of love of union to which God is pleased to raise it'.[1] The nature of the trials themselves and the soul's fidelity in response qualify the extent of time, too. 'Those who have the disposition and greater strength to suffer. He purges with greater intensity and more quickly. But those who are very weak are kept for a long time in this night, and these He purges very gently and with slight temptations'[2].

'In regard to certain souls, the inability to meditate and the dryness are continual; with others, the mind at times resumes its liberty, and God grants them some consolations, lest they should lose courage and fall away'.[3] 'Such are neither properly in the night nor properly out of it . . . and only after a long time do they attain to purity of perfection in this life, some of them never attaining to it'[4]. Often the director experiences difficulty in giving guidance, and the soul is not encouraged easily in this mutually painful state.

Other souls which are weaker, God Himself accompanies, first appearing and then passing to another

1 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. V., ch. XIV, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbruine)
2 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. I, ch. XIV, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)
3 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 282,
4 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. V, ch. XIV, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)

place'1, in order that they may seek after Him. 'But the souls which are to pass on to so high and happy an estate as is the union of love are wont as a rule to remain for a long time in these aridities and temptations'2; 'generally speaking, these last a certain number of years'3.

Duration and intensity, then, depend upon the will of God and the soul's corresponding fidelity. But whether the Night is short or long, it is fully in the hands of God; He purifies, He sanctifies, He suffers no obstacles. Care must be taken never to discourage a soul that is doing and giving all, for such generosity is exceedingly sweet and pleasing to the Lord.

3.—Line of Conduct.

Seeking Advice

As in all difficulty, the very first thing we must do is to open ourself to our director; a simple and sincere soul is open always. Now our director either will see that we are in the Night, or he will not. We shall suffer if he does not. As implied earlier, it is possible to be in the Night without enduring many of its secondary trials; they are not absolutely necessary, though their presence is a safe indication. It suffices if our director is a man of God who understands how God works in souls. If he has studied what ascetical and mystical authors instruct on this subject, it is good; and if he has had the fortunate companionship and advice of other directors who have realised purgation themselves, it is all to the better, of course. Then too, the task is less difficult when a soul has been under the same director's guidance for any

1 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk.V, ch. XIV, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)
1 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. V, ch. XIV· (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)
• Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 283.

length of time, long enough for him to know its qualities of faithfulness to grace. Such knowledge enlightens both the soul and director, simplifying their line of conduct in any trial.

The Golden Rule.

But all our counsel is resumed without flaw in Saint Benedict's fourth degree of humility, where, in the 'golden rule' he says: 'Secure the soul in silence, love patience and endure, neither tiring nor surrendering', *Tacita conscientia, patientiam amplectatur, sustinens non lascescat vel discedat.* If it is the rule in all trials, it is especially fitting for our time of purification. And although the fourth degree is concerned with trials of varying intensity that are sent by God to purify His faithful servant, those on the higher levels correspond to what Saint John of the Cross outlines in his Nights. *Igne nos examinasti, sicut igne examinatur argentum.* [1] 'Thou hast tried us by fire, as silver is tried.'

Tacita conscientia: Impressions of imagination, otherwise known as our own judgments, are to be mistrusted. They are responsible for the awful, magnified mountains we make of our difficulties. The director should hear and truly sympathise with the trials laid before him. Then he must try to pacify the soul: 'True, true, your suffering is great. But don't make it worse. Keep your sense of proportion. You know how' we all tend to aggravate our troubles. What great grace the saints gained from their sufferings! Think of Our Lord.'

Patientiam amplectatur: Only a soul in peace, having inner stillness, can even consider patience. 'Accept your

[1] Psalm LXV, 10; quoted by Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. XII, 4th degree.

cross in patience, for His sake. Be patient! And never be afraid to come back here if things get worse.'

Sustinens: And they will get worse. 'But endure, hold fast. Your suffering is going to remain a while. God is doing great things in you. He is shaping you for eternity and for your own happiness.'

Non lascescat: Have infinite confidence in God. Everything will turn out well, but you must trust Him. He sees you. Give yourself over to Him. Now God is trying you. But He will return. Remember, infinite patience.'

Vel discedat: 'But do not think of standing still, just waiting, doing nothing. You do not want to lose the place He has given you, do you? Pray always. Do not think of giving that up. Pray in any way you are able; that is how you can prove your generosity to Him. And be regular in your formal prayer periods, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament as before; make frequent returns to Him. Sweep aside any distaste or discouragement. If you are tempted, go right up to God and tell Him how much you love Him and believe in Him: My God, I do believe. I believe in what You are doing now. I believe that You love me. I love You, My God, and I shall always love You.'

Now if you are given any measure of freedom during the trial, be careful not to wander, risking distraction. And when you are drawn and at the same time repulsed by God, turn to Him and re-turn to Him in acts of confidence and love, in abandonment. 'If this thought of God that is with you all the time makes you suffer and feel weary, do not pity yourself, do not fall back on yourself. It is far better to be faithful in your exercises and interior mortification than to try to escape God.' Come what may, then, you must remain generous, faithful and confident.

And despite the anguish in your lower senses, your will shall remain perfectly firm.

A director must be all things to all souls, helping each to find its true abandonment and holy confidence.

Now few books will be found specifically helpful to a soul in this state, with the possible exceptions of Father de Caussade's *Abandon à la Providence divine,* (particularly the second volume containing the letters); *Le saint Abandon* by Dom Lehodey, in which trials and suffering are carefully studied; and certain passages in Rodriguez. Now the Old Testament, in which God conducts His Israelites through darkness, contradiction and pain to the promised land, may relieve some of the soul's tension in this state. And of the Prophets, Isaias is noteworthy. Lastly we recommend the lives of those saints who endured great periods of dryness and aridity. We must caution, however, against reading works of affective piety, because they can plunge such a soul into a kind of martyrdom. And mysticism is inadvisable, too, at this time. Mystical works could occasion that sort of inwardness in which the soul seeks to probe its own state and thus to find its *self* again. In cases where there is danger of serious upset or delusion it may even be necessary to exclude reading altogether.

The director and penitent should conceive of God as the Master Who has His faithful servant's best interest at heart, and Who is trying him accordingly.

With such support and understanding, the soul's suffering life will be a one of great and increasing generosity, turning ever the more from self to God. But the suffering does not go on indefinitely; ever so slowly, it seems, but with certainty, God's hour approaches. There comes a calm and peace that are incomparable. The soul feels that the end of its trial has come, that the senses are in their final submission. The trials diminish and the Night is drawing to a close.

7.—The Ending of the Night of the Senses.

It is exceedingly rare for the Spirit's Night to follow immediately upon that of the Sense. The customary interval lasts long enough for the soul to gain sufficient strength and maturity to sustain a new trial of nearly crushing force. And this interval is a one of most delicate and 'sweet contemplation.' Such is the gift of God to a soul that has endured.

Its senses are now ordered and under its spirit; the Night has produced a soul that is pure and supple, and living only for the divine penetration.

XL—THE STATE OF QUIET

1.—Elements.

Quietude is a contemplative grace in which God begins to penetrate the soul and to bestow upon it unparalleled knowledge, love and sweetness of Himself. 'The will is in union with God, the superior part of the soul is involved in divine action; but the understanding, memory and imagination are free. And so distraction is not impossible or rare, since all the faculties of the soul are not yet perfectly controlled'[1].

2.—A Concrete Case.

We have already spoken of the religious who went through a Night of the Senses that was painful and long, lasting, in fact, a year and a half. But as that period closed, a calmness came upon him and his soul enjoyed a profound peace. He realised the presence of God now, as never before, as an actual feeling; and though feeble and intermittent at first, its pitch developed until it was almost always present. He thought of going to his Father Master; but suspecting that the feeling was an illusion, and having no theoretical knowledge of the matter, the religious decided to apply a test of time, to see if the feeling would become fully habitual.

His spiritual director remarked, 'You have a *real* smile to-day!'

'Well—there has been a kind of change—recently, Father.'

[1] Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 321.

'How SO? '

'A wonderful sense of peace—and something else, something I never experienced before—I *feel* God inside, my soul touches Him, like my hand on your desk.' The religious gently grazed the top of his director's desk; 'and even now the feeling doesn't stop. I want to think about God, His Greatness, His Goodness, His Transcendence. But the whole thing is quiet and wonderful. . . . Think of God's Transcendence ! It sums up everything! '

Out of his silence the spiritual director spoke briefly, 'My dear child, you haven't the slightest idea in the world what a grace this is. Later you will understand. But for the present just thank God. From now on you will not be able to leave His presence! '

This simple, concrete case will help us to examine each of the component parts of the prayer of quietude. We shall attempt to present them in a practical rather than theoretical manner, again borrowing much from the admirable synthesis made by Dom Lehodey, which is so much in harmony with the teaching of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

3.—Realising the Presence of God.

A soul given this incomparable grace is apt to be thoughtless in regard to other things. 'In ordinary kinds of prayer we have a remembrance, an *awareness,* or we are mindful of God; we know and love Him by faith. In passive contemplation the soul generally *feels* a mysterious, impression. God, Who dwells in the soul of the just, manifests His presence there in a manner that must be experienced to be understood. Our soul really perceives its possession of God, its union with Him; it perceives

that it is, in a way, plunged and thoroughly absorbed into Him. Now when this impression is strong it is like a loving spiritual embrace; and then our soul is as sure of the presence of God as if He were beheld with eyes or touched by hands. The soul can actually feel Him within.

'This is a fact established by the experience of all mystics, and no author denies it. Father Poulain defends this expression by authority that is diverse and decisive. Among others, Saint 'Peresa learned in this way that God dwells within the soul. She could never believe that a soul had been favoured with the prayer of union unless it was absolutely sure, afterwards, that it had been with God. She affirms in ten places that the feeling of the presence of God is first encountered in the prayer of quietude. And though obscure and veiled while the mystical inflow is weak, God's presence is manifest when it is strong'1.

And Saint Francis of Sales says, 'When delicately feeling the divine presence, the soul enjoys a sweet repose.2 . . . This presence is a sweetness in-drawn insensibly. There is no need for a word. . . . The sweet sight and presence of its Spouse leaves the soul speechless'.3

'This feeling of His presence is no product of imagination,' according to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, 'but is certitude received from on high; it is the spiritual, experimental certitude that God is in the soul'4.

'The perception of God is calm, peace and happiness. It is born in that most hidden and sweet recess where God is present to the soul'5, in the words of Scaramelli.

And here is what Mother Teresa Couderc tells of the taste of God: 'It is easier to experience than to describe.

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 310-311.
2 Saint Francis of Sales, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu,* Bk. VI. ch. VIII.
3 Saint Francis of Sales, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu,Ok.* VI, ch. IX-
4 D'après ses mémoires, *Vie de Saint Alphonse,* η. 40.
5 Scaramelli, *Directoire Mystique,* Tr. 3, n. 28.

. . We may describe it as a sweet feeling of the love and presence of God; the soul realises such goodness and is so totally recollected in Him that it can scarcely turn away. . . . I have often to do violence to myself to keep this hidden during recreation. . . . Every other pleasure is insipid, after the taste of God'1.

4.— God: Known and Loved Ineffably.

Considered from the psychological standpoint, it would seem to the soul that everything else derives from this contact with God. After contact, the new manner of knowing and loving Him is present, most likely through the gifts of wisdom and understanding. A mysterious fusion of light and love floods through the soul.2

Saint John of the Cross notes that contemplation is 'the science of love. This, as we have said, is an infused and loving knowledge of God, which enlightens the soul and at the same time enkindles it with love, until it is raised up step by step, even unto God its Creator. For it is love alone that unites and joins the soul with God'3. Then God communicates 'a light that warms.' 'The knowledge received in this manner is general and obscure. And just as the intellect does not grasp it altogether clearly, so is the will's love generalised; it is a vague, secret, instinctive love that bears the soul to its beloved. Now God is the light and love in this delicate communica-

1 Longhaye, *Histoire de la Congregation de N.-D. du Cénacle,* 178;— Cf. Poulain, *Grâces d'oraison,* 79-85, (11th ed.).

1 Mystical experience 'is an experimental contact of the substance of our soul with God present in us, realised under the action of the Holy Ghost in a being wholly given over to Him. This contact is expressed, *in ipso actu* by infusion of light to the intellect, and by the union of love.' Dom Charles Coster, O.S.B., *Témoignages,* n. 5: (Mystique et Poésie, le chemin de l'amour, 6.)

* Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk. II, ch. XVIII, 5, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)

tion. He acts equally upon the intellect and will; yet He can give a greater measure of knowledge than love, or more love than knowledge, if He so wills'1.

'Thus it is God Himself Who is perceived and tasted therein. And, although He cannot be experienced manifestly and clearly, as in glory, this touch of knowledge and delight is nevertheless so sublime and profound that it penetrates the substance of the soul.'2 . . It is a matter of knowing and loving by experience; 'for there are no words to expound such sublime things of God as come to pass in these souls; whereof the proper way to speak is for one that knows them to understand them inwardly and enjoy them and be silent concerning them. . . And in this way the soul in such a state tastes of the things of God, and there are communicated to it fortitude, wisdom, love, beauty, grace and goodness, and so forth . . . this touch, being of God, savours of eternal life'.3

The soul, under these divine touches, is like a child pressed lovingly to its mother's heart. This silent embrace is more expressive than words could ever be. The child has heard, seen, reasoned nothing; it has only felt the loving embrace, and now it knows the heart of its mother.'4

5.—Influence on the Soul.

'This loving union in which there is felt such a vivid possession of God, impresses an 'inward peace and quiet and rest'5 upon the very centre of the soul. Saints John

1 Saint John of the Cross—Cf. Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale* 303.
* Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* Bk. II, ch. XXVI, 5, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)
3 Saint John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love,* St. II, v. 4, 21, (Peers tr. Bums Oates & Washboume)
4 I/ehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 305.
6 Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* Bk. II, ch. XIII, 4, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washboume)

of the Cross and Teresa constantly emphasize this character of mystical prayer. Light and love are given to our faculties; any painful labour like meditation is no longer necessary, for 'they are in repose and their action consists in a simple, sweet, loving attention to God.' The soul's hunger is appeased, it has been refreshed and cooled. Famished for God, it had sought Him everywhere. Now He is found again, and taken, as it were, into the soul. He is the light of the mind and the heart's restful love. And feeling God within, the soul's one desire is to possess Him ever the more, forever. Appeasement, sweetness in prayer and the presence of God are all felt to increase in one single movement. This union produces a joy that may even cause transports and a kind of spiritual inebriation. In this delicious repose, 'this profound peace, the will is inebriated with love'1; it forgets its former pain, is strengthened for new trials, strides ahead in virtue, advances at a giant's pace towards where it will be 'transformed in God through love'2, which is perfection itself'3.

6.—The Ligature.

Once in the mystical union of quiet, our interior faculties are restricted somewhat in their functioning. They are bound, or in ligature. And we find marked difficulty 'in meditating, praying vocally, in making any number of distinct, interior acts, except when God's action forces effusions of love out of the soul'4.

We experienced a kind of block in the prayer of simplicity; though it was then more a fear of losing God

1 Saint Teresa, *Chemin de la Perfection,* ch. XXXII.

• Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* Bk. II, ch. V, 3, (Peers tr. Burns Oates & Washbourne)

• Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 313-314.

• I^ehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 315.

that maintained our soul in silence. But the ligature is different. It is like an interior hand, compressing and actually tying our faculties. And yet we know that it could be broken and that we could be free of it; but at the same time we know better. We suspect such breakage, fearing to harm our soul. Our fear is wise, the harm could be great.

However, 'the ligature is weak when quietude is weak. Normally they increase together . . .' and similarly with 'the impression of repose that accompanies quietude. . . . It is very likely that this impression is produced by the ligature'.[1] Further on we shall treat of the kinds of activity that are susceptible to ligature.

7.—Influence on the Body.

Ecstatic mystical union completely absorbs the body; it is pronounced in full union, and the influence is felt less still in quietude. Now it is interesting to point out that just as quietude is capable of binding the free activity of the body in a greater or lesser degree, we know by experience that certain kinds of movement can lessen and actually extinguish the feeling of God's presence in us.

Such are the elements which constitute the *action of God* as it occurs in quietude; the 'soul finds itself introduced into a new world where the supernatural is almost at our hand's touch'.[2]

8.—Passivity of the Soul.

But what does the soul do during all this? Quietude is infused by God; quietude is a state of passivity in the soul. 'God communicates Himself to it passively, even as to one who has his eyes open, so that light is communicated to

[1] Poulain, *Des Grâces d'oraison,* 187.
[2] Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 316.

him passively.'1 . . 'Then it is necessary for the soul to assume an almost passive attitude without any thought of acting by itself; but keeping itself in a simple, pure and loving attention, as one would do who willingly opens his eyes to look with love upon another. . . . God is the agent who infuses and touches, while the soul is the recipient. . . . During all the time that God is pouring in His light and love, the soul should be gathering it attentively'2.

During the Night of purification the soul learned how to be passive, renouncing its former, personal way of knowing and loving God. But at this stage, the slightest wilful wandering, the least returning into self, restricts the divine work.

'Completely passive contemplation is rare indeed. The will's co-operation is necessary in order to keep the mind fixed in a simple gaze, and the heart steadily moving in acts of love. Now when the soul is deeply affected, such labour is a necessity, and the necessity delightful. But if God's action is feeble, distractions and ennui are held back only at the cost of vigorous, tiring labour'.3 The soul must expect to work painfully, then, during dryness, after having rejoiced in the divine embrace during its first days of quietude. And it is generally true that inasmuch as the soul's Night was long and grievous, so are its mystical gifts many and intense.

1 Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* Bk. II, ch. XV, 2, (Peers tr. Bums Oates & Washbourne)
* Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 299-300.
• Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 301.

XII.—QUIETUDE : THE PERIOD OF BLESSINGS

In Chapters Twelve and Thirteen we shall consider the experience granted to some souls in the prayer of quiet. We trust that this may help to relieve and reassure anyone who has been confused by such feelings, and who may have, at times, considered them illusory. Now an exposition of this type can increase the faith of every Christian: for as it is given to mystics to experience in some way the inner working of God in the soul, so are they witnesses giving testimony of this to their brethren, in whose souls the loving, Paternal action of God also takes place, though in a complete obscurity of faith.

i.—The General, Habitual State.

A soul emerging from the Night is in peace. And any astonishment or lack of ease is due to the new and unusual feeling of God's presence. But after its peacefully-sweet prayer is approved, the soul of abandonment proceeds with joy into its gentle interior repose where God is found. Now the soul's abandonment together with its feeling of the presence of God become pronounced, vivid and finally habitual. It forgets everything else in order to preserve this precious contact with God; for from here flows the ineffable light of love that brings such wonder and gladness with it, giving the soul a realization of its own littleness and of the immensity of God. During the night of the senses the soul was haunted by a painful memory of God. Now, it finds Him again, and although it thinks of Him without any distinction of persons, it possesses Him with relish and enjoyment.

'Whenever the soul is close to God and intimate with Him, it feels enveloped in mystery: *Nubes et caligo in circuito ejus.*[1] This mystery is the inevitable consequence of the infinite distance separating creature and Creator.In every way the finite being is surpassed by The One Who is the eternal, very plenitude of Being. This is why one of the most profound characteristics of the divine Being is His incomprehensibility; . . . the invisibility here below of the divine light is a truly wonderful thing'[2].

At the beginning of quietude it is this incomprehensibility of God that strikes us, according to Father Poulain,[3] who then quotes Bossuet: 'When God calls us, we find that union with Him transcends any particular concept; He is too hidden.. .. This does not mean that His attributes are lost to us; rather, we enter into an obscureness that is the profound incomprehensibility of the divine Being. Here is an attribute, and an unquestionably august one. . . . We seem to see clearly that we can see nothing; because anything we could see would be unworthy of God. This is a dream to an animal man, but nourishment for the spiritual one'[4].

There are few if any distractions at this stage. Even when coming and going or moving about in manual work, prayer is facile, almost second-nature. Excessive movement is bad, of course, for it upsets the state of interior attention. Now one should try to be especially attentive to the holy text, and careful in modulation during the Divine Office. But this will not always be possible. . . . And if conferences and sermons do not treat of the one subject that interests the soul, they will be hard to follow; yet almost any treatment of a subject would prove unsuitable to a soul

[*] Psalm, XCVI, 2.
[1] Marmion, *Le Christ dans ses Mystères,* 147 (L'Epiphanie).
[2] Poulain, *Des Grâces d'oraison,* 123.
[*] Bossuet, Lettre 91 à la soeur Comuau.

in this state. Such mentally divided half-attention makes study difficult, for the soul is really given over to God, not wishing to endanger its blessed contact. Is all this ungenerous, is it spiritual greed? In part, perhaps. But it is also a result of the ligature of the faculties. Should we still be careful of what we read? There is no longer a problem, for reading is hardly attractive or necessary. And where is a suitable book? Providentially one might come across *Noms divins* in the *Théologie mystique* by the Pseudo-Dionysius, or other similar works, but they are so very few in number! As a last remark on the general, habitual state during quietude, we mention the fact that one's health is usually affected. But the soul is little concerned, being divinely taken and wholly lost in God.

2.—Particular Manifestations.

The general state may last for as long as a year, during which there may be some occasions when the intensity of God's action will increase; such manifestations vary of course, according to the person involved and God's particular design. And we sincerely trust that no one will make the error of regarding as a norm what is merely a presentation of certain experiences.

First there are the Sacraments. With what happiness does the soul receive God in the Host! For now it really knows His gift. In this period of the blessings of quietude, the soul is not drawn by the humanity of Jesus; it receives God and it is God Who penetrates it in such a piercing, living manner. In a silent love the soul aw-aits and allows this heavenly penetration, and it abides in God for as long as He wills, forgotten in His sweetness and delight. This is the divine embrace that enfolds and unites both mind and will for hours.

And the Sacrament of Penance is a very great blessing. The soul implores and obtains permission from its director to receive it often, daily if possible. It thirsts ardently for absolution; as soon as the sacramental words are pronounced, the soul seems to realise their effect. It is as if engulfed in an ocean of Divinity, like a sponge in deep water, absorbed as much as it can be. This union is prolonged in countless graces and blessings.

Communion in the morning and Penance in the evening become the two poles of the day. They are the soul's fountains of living water, for which it sighs and pants as does the hart. Then one realises how pure the soul should be, and what barely visible dust can stain it; what internal watchfulness God demands if the soul would enjoy unbroken union with Him.

And again, in a time of intensity, an opportune reading or conversation with a soul in a similar state of union can induce even further intensification of the feeling of God's presence within. And visiting the Blessed Sacrament may be none the less effective; though as at Communion, it is *God* Whom the soul comprehends. And just as at Communion, it knows profoundly that every blessing comes through, with and in Jesus Christ. It is true that some souls in this state have been frightened when they learned that saints and spiritual authors (Saint Teresa especially) condemn departure from Jesus and His Sacred Humanity as error and illusion. But here is not a case of the soul's voluntarily laying Jesus aside. It is grace and the grace of Jesus Himself that is responsible for the new orientation; a ligature has been imposed upon the soul's faculties, and the time is not yet when the soul is free to behold Jesus, or His Mother, Mary.

For the soul is at that stage of quietude in which God, the God Who Is, takes it and holds it fast. God is abiding

within the soul and the soul within Hirn. It experiences the Pauline declaration: *In Ipso vivimus et movemur et sumus*[1] 'In Him we live and move, and be.' And it possesses holy Angela of Foligno's overpowering truth: 'The whole universe is filled with God.' The Night of Sense is done and the soul has been purged; God is now as lavish with His blessings as He was with trials. There is nothing to do but remain attentive in sweetness and love, accepting whatever He gives. The soul is God's constant captive. And distractions are in no way intensive or tenacious. How could they hinder a soul that is tasting moments of full union ?

When He wills, God administers a new but temporary purification to some souls, before bringing them to another stage in prayer, of which we shall speak presently. But most remain in the state of quiet. And these latter souls meet with variations in the object of their contemplation; in this way they come to realise how unstable and fluctuating their own human intensity can be.

3.—Variations in the Object of Contemplation.

In the beginning, God in Himself is usually the object of contemplation: God The One, or a certain one of His perfections. But as later happened in the case of the religious whom we have described, the object became *the Trinity*. Now in such a change, although the soul still feels the deep, inner presence of God, its thought dwells upon the Three Divine Persons; and it seems to understand that each Person has a special love for it. We could describe this realisation and love in the same words that we have used previously, and of course there are many fine pages written on the Holy Trinity; but writing has rarely

[1] Acts, XVII, 28

expressed anything that corresponds to the desires of a soul that feels the very indwelling of the Trinity.

However, there are certain enduring expressions that both sweeten the soul and enliven its gladness. Saint Gertrude's *Semper tranquilla Trinitas* tenders a peaceful, glowing abandonment. And there are these simple lines on the life of the Trinity: 'The divine life is an immense ocean of love whose Holy Spiritual tides rise and fall ceaselessly from P'ather to Son and Son to Father.' A soul plunged in this divine ocean 'is whirled by the Holy Spirit in a circling wave of vision and love that is the very goodness of God, the goodness so fully given to those that are angelic and in beatitude'.[1]

And in some wonderful manner the prayer of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity can plunge the soul back again into that one and triune love of its delight, giving it over anew' to each divine Person: the Word Who teaches and holds it, the Holy Ghost Who embraces and identifies it with Jesus, the Father Who loves it as His child in Whom He takes delight. The feast of the Most Holy Trinity with its uninterrupted octave, are days of happiness for such a soul. The antiphons express its human helplessness, its admiration of God. And the movements of His grace that the holy words describe are the interior movements that fill this soul with love.

A priest-religious in this blessed state will celebrate the Mass of the Holy Trinity whenever he can. *Benedicta sit sancta Trinitas,* from these opening words of the Introit, his soul seems overshadowed, *cum tremore divino,* as if by a cloud; but it is really in a gaze of diffusion in the bosom of the Trinity, there beholding the Father Who is glorified by the Son in the Holy Ghost. The priest's soul is with the Father Who is condescending

[1] Bemadot, *De l'Eucharistie à la Trinité,* 57.

from Heaven, His divine Spirit being sent down upon the altar, where His Son, present sacramentally on the corporal, unites the priest to Himself, so that the perfect Victim may be offered up to God. The whole of the celestial court is there; the saints the Angels, the Most Noble Queen of Heaven and earth, all are around the altar, assisting at Mass, close to the priest who knows that they are there. This is the truth that would pierce and penetrate the soul, in order to own it forever. And to leave this altar, is, in a manner, redescending Mount Thabor. Thus when 'The Three* are in a soul, the divine action is more silent, more sweet and more intensely centred. Of course there are occupations, but the soul is so deeply recollected, that they are not distracting. After awakening in the morning, it anticipates the Mass for which it lives; and having said it, the soul continues to live through, with and in that Mass.....

Now after another period of time, the intense drawing of the Holy Trinity will seem to diminish, as will the inward feeling of God. The soul strives to retain its fervent delight and happiness, but vainly; again God bestows an experience of its powerlessness, so that it may know all the more that nothing can be done without Him. It is as if God were far off, on the other side of an impossible abyss. And not without a certain sadness, yet silent and in peace, the soul awaits the will of God, enduring perhaps for a period of weeks. Then blessed *Jesus,* the Word Incarnate, reappears. How truly He is Mediator between Creator and little creature ! What joy He is! The recognition of Jesus convinces the soul more profoundly than it ever could have hoped, of its eternal debt to Him; and its life with Jesus, enjoyed before for so long in the intimate prayer of simplicity, is lived now anew and magnified a hundredfold in this present, intensive recognition.

Yet even above the mutual gaze of love between them, there is felt something like a chain binding the essence of the soul to the divine Prisoner. And to have to leave the Tabernacle was never more difficult; for the soul is torn I iway, the bond is broken, and this is a grievous experience. Now such a soul can recognise an empty Tabernacle, and it understands the extraordinary experiences the saints had in this regard. Chanting the Divine Office is not easy, either, for the choir-stall is not far distant from the Tabernacle. But this soul is given moments when it can freely chant forth its gladness and praise; then it does not feel itself, md it would feel as though Christ were chanting in it. Consciously it lends its heart and lips to Jesus, through Whom its praise may ascend to the Father ... to Whom :t may be all the more agreeable. . . .

Following not far behind her Son is Mary, the sweet *Mother* of God, more loving and more beloved than ever before. And she does not come without her special blessing: the soul is allowed to *realise* her maternal love, to be penetrated through and through by it, and at last to be plunged as if into her own heart! Her name is a name of almost unutterable delight; and both tongue and heart bespeak proof of this tender, filial love. There are true graces and intimacies reserved for her loving and best-loved children, as witnessed in the beautiful pages of Sister Mary of Saint Teresa.

Having rediscovered Jesus and Mary, the soul understands that the ligature is to be mitigated somewhat; it can even select objects that attract its contemplation; and it is able to harmonise itself with the mysteries in the liturgical cycle.

Now in God's own time, a tenuous and gentle attraction will possess the soul, drawing it to *the Holy Ghost,* Who is to be its Director for several years, conducting

and forming it in sweetness, strength and light. This divine schooling prepares a soul that is to be presented to God *the Father.* Now there is no way of speaking of the presence of the Father in a soul. It is unbelievable, and to be spoken of only by saints; for the Father brings a quality of tenderness and delicacy that evokes in every soul something similar to what Saint Francis of Sales expressed as a 'maternal fatherliness.' The soul is flooded with effusions that are so touching, so unimaginable, so very far beyond its gratitude that mute abandonment is its sole response; it can do no more than become a child nestling in the only tender and delicate arms it could possibly know and love, those of its father and mother.

Experience of this kind faintly echoes that described by Saint Bernard: 'Yet happy is that kiss of participation whereby we not only know God, but also love the Father, Who, without doubt, is not fully known until He is perfectly loved. My brethren, is there amongst you one who sometimes, in the depths of his heart, hears the Spirit of the Son crying: *Abba,* 'Father'? If such there be, let him feel assured of the love of the Father, for he has the testimony of his own conscience that he is led by the same Spirit as the Son. O soul w'ho art such, whosoever thou be, have courage, have confidence, and fear nothing.[1] In the Spirit of Christ thou canst recognise thyself as the child of the Father.'

[1] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. VIII, 9, (Mount Melleray tr.).

XIII.—RECOMMENDATIONS TO A SOUL IN QUIETUDE.

1.—Recommendations for Dryness.

Prayer is necessary if the soul would remain united to God.

After entering the quiet state, a soul enjoys an intensive feeling of God. This may last for a long period, before gradually diminishing. The feeling may even fade out altogether and return sporadically to the soul. What is the cause of this? Amazing as it might appear, it is possible for a soul to be careless or unconcerned about the indwelling presence of God; it finds the feeling monotonous after a while; its generosity narrows and it becomes increasingly disinterested in prayer and interior mortification. But there are other souls that are not apparently negligent, yet whose contact with God seems still to dissolve.

Now the drymess of quietude consists of these alternating appearances and reappearances, of these 'vicissitudes', as Saint Bernard called them. But whether such dryness is 'through fault or not'[1], interior mortification, prayer and returns to God will have to be redoubled; this is the only treatment that will enable a soul to endure dryness and to rise above it. Now it is evident that a soul in the state of quiet is most sensitively aware of God's interior action, and desires to maintain and increase its degree of union with Him. Accordingly the soul experiences actual need of asceticism and prayer, the two means

[1] Cf. This work, Bk. I, 19, 71-74.

whereby this union may be perfected. We stress the point because it is of cardinal importance.

Leaving asceticism aside for the moment, let us consider a soul that has neglected prayer. It has lost all feeling of the divine presence. It is only after frequent and prolonged prayer, then, that the Presence will begin to return, slowly increasing in sweetness and penetrating the higher faculties of the soul anew.

What happens w-hen a man who has been weakened by illness receives sound nourishment again? Little by little his strength returns. If someone frozen with cold happens upon a thermal spring, will he not feel a marvellous incoming warmth and well-being? And if a plant is left unwatered in the sun, it will approach its death; for water means abundance, refreshment and life. So it is with a soul that has lost God; in as much as it re-finds Him Who is its divine Warmth, its Source of Living Water, so much will it live again. Experience of this kind quickly teaches a soul that to desert prayer is to embrace dryness; and a prolonged lack of prayer can lead to final effacement of the presence of God, a dissolution within the soul. So the spiritual life is truly a life of prayer; it depends upon prayer. Of course we are not forgetful of the Sacraments. Their value is incalculable, and we must receive them as often as we can. But let us also never forget that the Sacraments produce their effects only to the extent that the soul is prepared for them. And a soul is prepared by its life of prayer.

No matter what our state then, if we have lost God let us pray. For in this we shall find Him again !

We may gain a deeper knowledge of how God works in the soul during prayer, if we examine an actual case. This soul is habitually in quietude, but at the present time it does not experience anything of the presence of God.

What happens at prayer and how will God be found, again ?

God acts always

Afflicted by dryness and wandering distractions, the soul is attempting to recollect itself before the Tabernacle, as was its custom during arid periods in the state of simplicity. Its mind will not be led back to God; it is hard even to look at the Tabernacle. The soul feels restless and enervated. 'Fen, fifteen, twenty minutes of struggling and nothing happens. Such prayer must surely be a waste of time ! And the decision to go away brings great relief to the soul. Nevertheless, God *is* working.

Suddenly, at the point of departure, the soul experiences a very slight, dawning radiance within; it is the presence of God, but so interior and rarified that an inexperienced soul would not perceive it at all. This peaceful penetration continues, expanding to the faculties, disengaging them automatically from every distraction and preoccupation. As Saint Francis of Sales describes it, the faculties seem to withdraw themselves and turn back towards their heavenly magnet, in order to be with Him once more; for St. Teresa, it is the divine melody that charms and captivates them. At last the soul has been given its cherished taste of God again; the body relaxes and is still, its eyes rest effortlessly on the Tabernacle. And there is certainly no great relief, now, in having to depart from such a divine presence !

Thus, while we work in apparent fruitlessness, God, too, is working; quietly He is preparing our soul for His presence.

The importance of interior silence. Passive recollection.

Dryness can assume a calmer and less severe form, permitting the soul to enter prayer in a recollected spirit

that has been attained by its own efforts. Now if, a little afterwards, the soul should feel itself being drawn into a deeper and deeper recollection, there is no doubt as to Who is responsible. A passive state of this kind differs so remarkably from active recollection, that Saint Teresa regarded it as an actual degree in prayer; for the soul is taken captive completely and experiences a foretaste of the coming of God. In fact He seems already present.

The divine return is always a fresh and moving experience. The soul finds God and rejoices, and then they are together again in heavenly stillness. Such stillness, or interior silence is the atmosphere of God; and experience of it would incline one to think that the small number of contemplatives is due to an almost universal undervaluing of silence. However, this must be a silence without dimension, pervading throughout the soul at prayer.

Now in the first intensive days of quietude, God does everything. But after that the soul must learn to be increasingly attentive; for it is easy to lose the divine Visitor. An unconscious distraction that has any substance whatsoever, some slight infidelity, a little return or look by which the soul seeks to verify what is happening within—and God is gone. A soul thinking it is in the slightest way worthy of divine contact, loses it. A soul must never forget that this grace is given out of the pure gratuity of God.

As before, departure from prayer will often be difficult; for when it has partaken of the great silence, a soul desires it always, and departs determined to preserve the grace by every means possible. To do this anxiety must be put aside, as well as useless preoccupation and any disordered activity.

The outward reflection of interior silence.

We have intimated that the mystic's manner is often

unusual. About his aspect, appearance, conversation and bearing there is a quality that Saint Benedict has marvellously signified in the degrees of humility[1] exteriorly evident in a monk who has arrived at interior perfection in this virtue. Many of the saints possessed this arresting and eloquent manner.

We are reminded here of two traits that Father Maxime Carlier[2] revealed during a period of intensive quietude. In the cloisters his movement was slow and measured, hands upon his breast as if he were carrying there the Blessed Sacrament, pressed against his heart; engrossed in recollection, his face was immobile and his salutations almost imperceptible. When this was brought up in the noviciate, his Father Master was heard to comment: 'Nobody wants to take God away from you!' And one day at chapter he accused himself of having made disordered movements while going over a fence. It was his way of saying that he had been out of the precious presence of God that normally enwrapped him.

On the other hand, we quote from a letter written by an exiled monk; it shows how one strives to preserve this attitude—even on a bicycle. 'Despite my love of cloistered life, the bicycle journeys I have to make here in exile are not really burdensome. The route is solitary and the horizon beautiful and *vast.* Whenever possible I let go the handlebars, put my hands under the scapular (just as in cloister!) and cross them over the sacred Presence. Then I let my eyes sink into that infinite horizon. And this is how I pray on a bicycle!

Oh! my prayer is so very much a thing of the senses; it is a long, blind gaze into a cloud of grey unknowing ... it is a dark but powerful light that the Spirit puts

[1] Saint Benedict, *Règle,* (8th-12th degree).
[2] Octave Daunaont, *Une âme contemplative—le p, Maxime Carlier, O.C.R.*

into my heart; it passes through the intellect, and the Mediator brings it on to our Father Who is in Heaven, as a thanksgiving for His great glory. Yes, true, it is *lived,* but nearly always in a grey, naked act of faith.'

Perfection seeks both exterior and interior silence. Quietude is a demanding, imposing grace.

2.— Rediscovering the Presence of God.

When a soul in quietude must cope with the fluctuating presence of God for any length of time, it learns the methods that He desires it to use in order to win Him, and make Him reappear, so to speak, or to intensify the feeling of His presence. Such experience is instructive for us, too, even if we have not yet been given this grace. And it will increase our faith in the methods themselves. Now those we have attempted to outline thus far concern our direct relationship with God: the Sacraments which allow us to feel His presence, and which even intensify it during the period of blessings, and the state of prayer and silence that is absolutely necessary. We shall indicate now, certain other methods that are not unlike alternatives to prayer.

Speaking to God.

During a period of pronounced quietude an overall silence is imposed upon the soul. Single-mindedly it wants to forget everything but God and His sweet presence. Nevertheless, there are times, and they need not be restricted to prayer, when the soul has a craving to speak to God. But there is a barrier; and yet it is not a real one, for the soul is sure it could force its way through. By instinct however, it avoids such action. Yet on other days of facility the heart's over-fullness flows forth:

psallite sapienter,[1] in what intense joy and abundance do these words come to life !

The soul is poor and little in the presence of the Father. It tries to articulate its *confusion, admiration* and *recognition* yet all the while it is being laden with heavenly entrancements. The soul is with its true Father, and how manifest is His fatherliness ! Its accents are respectful and tender, yet how infinitely familiar and confident. Each one of the soul's words raises it to a higher heaven of gladness; over and over again it says the same things, but the words are ever refined, renewed and reborn. It is a veritable inebriation of love. The soul speaks, the Father loves; the more it speaks the more He loves!

And converse with Mary is pure other-worldliness. Her love is the love of pure Virgin and pure Mother. And of that, nothing more can be said.

Speaking of God.

Now any kind of speech, even about God, is usually painful during quietude. First words emerge apprehensively; for they are under severe inward constraint. A real effort is required, so binding is the divine presence.

A religious had been living in this holy silence for several years when he was entrusted with a duty that would involve frequent conversation; his Superior said to him : 'You must pray for the grace to become more amiable. You know, when anybody draws near you, it is like approaching a fawn. You *do* come out of yourself after a few minutes, but the first contact is painful'.

It is the thought of being 'outward' and uprooted from God that causes this unhappy conflict in the soul. Now union with God is not necessarily broken by conversation. True, if the converse is banal, one's air of

[1] Psalm XLVI, 8; cited by Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. XIX.

abstraction may be noticed, 'You're so distant! Where are you?' And one is far away, as far distant as God is from any creature that does not speak or think of Him.

How good and sweet is conversation between souls who seek God truly, and spend their lives in His presence. Their attentive expressions denote what harmony they feel. And there is a special channeling of grace as they communicate the return or intensification of the divine presence, one to another. This can occur in a congregation, as Saint Bernard showed to his monks: 'Because of you, my brethren, I render thanks to God. I have found ears that can hear; by the manner in which you hasten to profit from it, I see the fruits of the word of God. But even more, I acknowledge that while I am speaking to you I *feel* of the very desire and ardour that is enflaming you. I say then, that the more avidly you drink in the milk of the word, the more, by grace, will the Holy Ghost fill my breasts; the more rapidly you drink what pours from me, the more shall I receive of it to pour it forth the more to you'.[1]

If one is speaking with a soul in the identical state the effect will be very much like that experienced formerly during spiritual conversation. But now, the person as such is not so important. What does matter is that another soul filled with God has been discovered; and the two souls are now one in Him. This is a special and unsurpassed joy reserved for His children; how consoling and encouraging are such hours of Heaven on earth. Providence can arrange such truly unforeseen encounters! And this is a delicate savouring of God Himself, a renewal of Emmaus and a sample of Paradise.

Meditative Reading.

A work impregnated with the divine quality is the only

[1] Saint Bernard, *I Sermon pour le Dimanche de la Septuagesime,* 2.

kind a soul should consider. Needless to say, Holy Scripture is the first and purest source of all. And a truly recollected reading is both pleasing to God and often instrumental in bringing Him back. Now in the state of quietude the soul receives many lights, enabling it to discover new shadings and meanings that were hidden before; these seem to appear effortlessly, and as a kind of enlightenment that is sweet yet substantial enough to be experienced. The soul realises then, that this enlightening Presence is the Holy Ghost. God's gift is a higher, loving knowledge of Himself, and an increase of faith in His Sacred Scripture.

Saints' biographies, and especially those containing direct quotations are fruitful, too. Now if other spiritual works have not the quality of divine impregnation, the soul should not concern itself with them; for at this stage its nourishment must be that divine product of interior and spiritually experienced authors. And we may remark here that if a soul desires to open and reveal itself—as in spiritual direction—its comment upon books and authors will be very revealing for the director. It is hardly necessary to add that souls in identical states of prayer have usually identical reading interests.

Contemplating Nature.

Nature's great spectacles, its immensity, the arc of the sun, a star-filled night, the ocean, . . . , are all means of rediscovering the presence of God. This is equally true of its smaller beauties, such as flowers and birds. These things caused ecstasies in Rose of Lima and other saints..

But the soul does not consider them as it did in the first degrees of the interior life. Whereas then the soul gazed outwardly in admiration, now it is seized within and

transported to God; it rejoices more in Him than in the beauty of His creature. And it is entranced by His absolute perfection, His grandeur, His incomprehensibility, His transcendence. Nor is it different for the soul in the case of music or chant. Everything beautiful brings God back so that He may enfold the soul into Himself.

Listening to a Reading or Sermon.

Prayer, holy admiration and powerfully acting graces are often the effects of listening to the life of a saintly person. Hearing how another consecrated everything to God, for His greater glory, can lead a soul to its own summit of love, where it craves also to give nothing but perfect glory to God. Although these feelings develop peacefully, they are very forceful. The soul finds itself in God and He seems to be the One Who is joyously affected by the reading; and whether the soul seems to be within God or God within the soul, it is God alone radiating His wholly-spiritual gladness.

There may be a similar manifestation during a sermon, or in the course of a retreat when the priest's description of God corresponds truly to the spirit in w'hich the soul itself lives. It is far more than attentiveness or captivation then; for the soul does not seem at all surprised at God's presence, or even at the divine happiness *He* experiences listening to the description of Himself. It is as if God wishes to verify this supernatural correspondence in order to make the soul participate in His own joy.

3.—Trials and the Realisation of God's Presence.

We shall set forth some others of these manifestations in the hope of bringing a little light and reassurance to any souls that find themselves in a difficult, painful way.

Humiliations.

In the early stages of quietude, as we have said, the feeling of the divine presence is continual. And the soul easily forgets humiliations along with everything else that is not the direct, vibrant experience of God. We remember one soul accusing itself of being immortified because it could spring up to God too quickly out of humiliation!

Now when quietude is at an ebb, so to speak, the soul is divided; though united to God, its humiliations are keenly felt. Obviously the pain would be much greater in pure dryness; for then the soul would not experience the slightest consolation of His presence. Yet it is a peculiarity of dryness that a profound humiliation can occasion the return of God. For humiliation seems to act, at times, almost sacramentally; it gives us God and there is no mistaking His presence. He uses this method in order to prove to the soul that its suffering is none the less His. Such an act of divine remembrance and love, such subtlety can never be forgotten. How wisely the saints valued humiliation!

Temptations.

The soul puts such deceits aside easily in the period of blessings. They do not enter the mind, for the mind is occupied, lost in God, seeking no other thing but Him: 'To the soul beholding its Creator, every creature appears insignificant,' *Animae videnti Creatorem angusta est omnis creatura.*[1]

Yet God, wishing to remind the soul what it is alone, by itself, may permit weeks of painful, humiliating, temptations. But even as the lower part of the soul is torn by temptation, its superior part adheres to God; and in the perfect balance that His presence there imparts,

[1] Saint Gregory the Great, *Dialogues,* Bk. II, ch. XXXV.

the soul enjoys His sweetness and delight. So even in its own wretched weakness, upheld over an abyss of sin, the soul realises Who mercy is; and knowing that without God all would be lost, the soul is all gratitude. It understands more deeply and clearly the difference between being tempted and yielding to temptation; for God's presence reassures the soul that it has neither yielded nor sinned. When a soul is in dryness and battling temptation, it will often feel the pacifying presence of God; after that, the battle is fought with confidence, strength and freedom from scruples.

Suffering.

Along with the divine favours, it is wise to recall the spiritual, moral and physical sufferings that normally accompany these states of prayer. Certainly, many souls are enticed by a hope for divine graces, but if they could know the suffering that goes with these graces, would they dare to accept them? The sons of Zebedee desired the first place in Jesus' kingdom. He said to them, 'You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?'[1] Many of the saints would have us understand that the degree of graces a soul can choose corresponds, in some way, to the degree of suffering that God gives as preparation for His favours.

Saint Teresa remarks: 'You would be astonished if you knew the paths and the means God reserves for (contemplatives), ... I know without question that God gives intolerable sufferings to contemplative souls, such suffering that if He did not let them taste His delights, they could not bear them. His Majesty feels it necessary to strengthen them not with water but with wine which so inebriates them that they will not think of their

[1] Matthew, XX, 22; Mark, X, 38.

sufferings and will be able to endure them ... I know few true contemplatives who are not both courageous and resolved to suffer.' 1.

And Blessed Mary of the Incarnation used to treat the mystical way in these words: 'I repeat, great interior and exterior hardship must be borne. A soul would be terrified to see what it has to experience in the future; and it might even give up its intention of going on, if there was not a secret and deep-rooted virtue sustaining it'.2

We should not forget that quietude has its different degrees of union and suffering. As we have indicated before, there are souls in this state that have experienced little if any of the short, intense Night of the Senses; a soul may desire this quiet prayer, then, without apprehension, abandoning itself entirely to God. And let us be well and simply assured that any soul aspiring to it must be faithful, generous and willing to persevere until God Himself sees fit to conduct the purification; at that time He increases the suffering little by little, not omitting the graces necessary for the soul to bear this painful, but always merciful action of divine love. And almost every soul must suffer to some degree. For in reality God is taking it over and re-making it, indentifying it more and more with Christ suffering and crucified.

We trust that these few details give a clearer understanding of the merciful, enlightening change that God works in the soul by suffering and trials.

Physical suffering.

Such tribulation is easier to bear during quietude, especially when the soul is in contact with God. Thinking of Him, or better still, captivated, a soul is little concerned

1 Saint Teresa, *The Way of Perfection,* ch. XX.
1 De Charlevoix, *Vie de la Vénérable Marie de l'incarnation,* liv. VI.

with itself or with its personal sufferings, and endures them with patient courage. For example, extremely cold hands or feet are hardly noticed while the soul is taken by God. But let it withdraw from God and give attention to the cold, and to its grief the cold is insupportable. If simple thought about God is effective, how much more so is the feeling of His presence! This casts some light upon the saints' abilities to withstand trials; only Love's intense union could conquer such fearful and unheard of sufferings.

Moral Suffering.

The feeling of God's indwelling presence is a balm of peace in the midst of care, anguish or legitimate preoccupation. The superior part remains reposeful no matter what assails the rest of the soul; now the more intensely the divine presence is realised the more thoroughly does its peace control any disturbance in the inferior part. The feeling can even become one of absolute assurance, moral certitude that there is nothing to fear. This is truly a pacification; and even the *formido,* that inner dread which ordinarily is beyond the will's control, vanishes. At such a moment it is clear that a special, divine intervention has taken place. The soul is confused yet confident; and its heart is overflowing with so much gratitude that it cannot utter a word. The soul abandons itself into a deeper abandonment to its infinitely paternal, delicate and provident God.

Diverse Trials.

The death of parents or of someone dear, or any bad news can, after a certain calmness has been regained, serve as an especial occasion for the soul to realise the presence of God. After Saint Francis of Sales had learned

of the death of his little sister, he wrote to Madame de Chantal: 'Nevertheless, my dear daughter, in the middle of this human heart that has been so afflicted over her death, I can feel a certain gentleness; there is tranquillity and a certain sweet repose of mind in divine Providence, which fills my soul with great contentment amidst its misfortune.'[1]

It is not unusual for God to let a soul realise that He has compassion for it. In our grief God is often reassuring: 'Have confidence, everything is in My hands. . .

The Demands of God.

The trials sent by God Himself are the most valuable of all. Sometimes He will re-apply holy rigours, and the soul tastes its Night-like suffering again. This is a matter of divine will; God wishes to purify the soul so that He may fill it the more with Himself. Here is how someone in the state of quietude expressed himself on the subject; he had been ill for months, imprisoned for months, and at this time was far away from his community.

'The rigours of this life, or those of prison life are absolutely *nothing* compared to the inflexibility of the life of Love. The divine gaoler conducts a vigorous reign of terror: not an act, not a word, not a gesture, not a look, not a thought that is outside His terrible control, or that escapes His impeccably just, strict, severe attention. The attention of Love, so august in its Majesty, seems indifferent to the wounds of reproach and suffering It inflicts upon the being of a poor creature. I beg you to gain me the grace of a generosity that will mean total *abandonment;* let there be no more of this in-turning, this seeking after self, this calculus that is anchored in the very bloodstream of man.'

1 Trochu, *Saint Francis de Sales,* Bk. II, 259.

But God does not forsake a faithful soul, nor does He disdain to come to it sometimes, as the writer's next letter attests: 'The Holy Presence? It is rather effaced. I cannot often see it clearly. But as my work in the stables now encroaches upon my time of thanksgiving after Mass, the Holy Presence is beginning to be kind. It gives encouragement and often abides with me. . . . So blessed be the Holy Presence! It is so very encouraging for someone who is alone. . .

Our Joys.

God is not concerned only with our suffering; often He partakes of our joys and includes us in His own. God Himself rejoices within the soul; He penetrates our joy with an intimate intensity, making it a pure and holy thing. When this happens, the soul is taken by surprise. It admires Him even in its confusion, and feels that God, in making its joy His own, wishes the soul to have true happiness in the midst of its trials.

Realising the presence of God is a powerful aid in bearing whatever trials come upon us; and if the trials are well borne, they often bring us back into God's indwelling presence. We could say that suffering is almost sacramental in the way it is a source of grace. And so from each mystical experience the little creature gains a greater and more ineffable knowledge of God, who yearns to live in its soul in a loving intimacy so great as to confound the creature. And in its turn, the creature thirsts to reveal Him to all those numbers and numbers who know Him not. But especially, His creature yearns to respond more perfectly to the divine advances, by a life more mortified and generous, so as to possess all the more, God's light and love.

But how does it happen that the soul is so often denied the higher degrees of prayer to which it aspires, and for which the state of quietude, is preparation ?

4.—Why do Some Souls not go Beyond the State of Quietude ?

This is a delicate and practical problem, differing somewhat from the one we examined at the beginning of mystical prayer. Many souls are called to the state of simplicity, but relatively few are chosen for the higher infused degrees. Why? Most of the great contemplatives answer, 'God knows,' without entering into the immense and insoluble discussion as to whether all souls are called or not to mystical prayer.

Now the souls in this exposition have been called to quietude, evidently. But does this imply higher states, too? And having entered, whose fault is it if they do not advance? Does God call them only as far as this degree, or is there a failing in their generosity or fidelity ?

We may start with those souls that spent generous years in suffering, and were brought to a state of intense quietude, only to relax and lose the priceless gift of contemplation. There are such souls. Saint Teresa knew them. It is deplorable but not astonishing; for this grace is not necessarily permanent. 'No one can know these things but the one who receives them,' *nemo scit, nisi qui accipit.* 'It is absolutely imperative to keep in touch with the grace of the present moment; by experiencing its fullness in each and every moment, we are constantly refreshed'1. This presupposes a noble and generous fidelity in prayer and mortification.

Now there are many souls enjoying lesser degrees of quietude. Their trials are often slight and short-lived;

1 Cf. 'A Friar Preaches', *Des fleures d'eau vive,* 192-193, (Abeille, Lyon, 1942).

and the characteristics of the Night are usually indistinct in such cases. Their prayer is prolonged, often quite unchanging, though it does experience some high and low points, of course. Yet despite their fidelity, these souls do not really seem to seek a higher state; and after a while their feeling of God's presence can become evanescent. There is no marked infidelity, nor is there any marked generosity. What happens is just the product of a rather unvarying monotony.

Now there are other souls that have undergone severe passive purgation and been accorded an intense degree in the prayer of quiet; they are faithful and generous as far as can be judged. But they do not advance, and their condition is one of anguish and perplexity. Let us not enquire into the reason for this. God's plan is unfathomable and all-merciful, turning all things to His greater glory. But it is important for us to determine a line of conduct. In certain ways this state demands the kind of perseverance counselled in the prayer of simplicity.

5.—Abandonment in Peace and Confidence.

We are not concerned then, with negligence that is really 'through fault'. This is corrected by a renewal of fervour and a particularly generous, assiduous practising of prayer and self-denial; anything else would amount to a disregard for the graces a soul can choose. And such inertia might tempt God to shut off the flow of the other ordinary graces that preserve the soul from falling deeply.

Now what advice is to be given when quietude lasts on unvaryingly, and when the soul does not have much hope for higher degrees of prayer? There should be no hint of discouragement. Instead, the soul must abandon itself to God in complete, heroic *confidence*. A soul in this state should be able to say, 'What does my degree of prayer

matter as long as I am accomplishing the will of God, with increasing faithfulness and love. . . And it is well to understand that there is nothing stationary about a soul merely because it is not taken up to a higher state of prayer. Each state contains many interior degrees; and a soul can be quite unconscious of its advancement. God never ceases His work where He finds fervour. To a religious asking, 'Where are you now?' someone who had been in quietude for a long time answered. T am enjoying God a little less. You see, He is working me a little more.'

But what *is* this work of God that demands such co-operation and confidence? It varies according to His plan or mission for each. Some souls have time enough to give themselves freely to prayer; God continues to purify them. As an example of this we quote from the letter of a religious who was disturbed at an associate's lack of understanding.

T beg your reassurance concerning the divine Presence brooding here in my breast, like a slumbering charcoal fire, stirred now and then by an odd draught. ... If I followed my soul's inclination, I should centre my whole spiritual life upon seeking, intensifying and living in the presence of Love; for I have the impression that this Presence is what adores the Father in spirit and truth. At any rate, taking one's joy from it demands the sacrifice of every other joy. It is what I should do if I took counsel of myself, Father; and it is what I advise any soul of capability and understanding. . . . But . . . not that I am really troubled, you understand, yet, I am piqued that a soul as spiritually enlightened as Father X. will not allow any *seeking* whatsoever after this union. He claims that the spirit of love can *only* be in giving; anything else is 'self-seeking' and impure. Now it is obvious that there are very generous, contemplative souls that are nothing but

pure 'aspiration', nothing other than a void waiting to be filled; their love is consummated in a Presence, a Meeting, a Union. The giving of oneself is just a prelude to this, a condition *sine qua non.* If these things are not true then I can no longer assume the responsibility of directing souls; if I see this matter as it is, then on behalf of my conviction I beg your clear and peremptory approval. . . .

'Would you be astonished, Father, if I go on to confide that I have a *really* deep grief? I cannot accomplish the will of our Father Who is in Heaven, as He asks. This is the hidden drama in my poor life: the daily infidelity, the infidelity of each living instant. When are you going to obtain the grace of fidelity for me, so that I can correspond to the demands of God? May your blessing bring that, Father!'

The divine action is manifest in this religious, as are the two characteristics of a fervent soul: ardent desire for God and an intense delicacy of conscience. This quality of conscience is almost never satisfied, so desirous of purity is our God, Who is, through Jesus, a 'Spouse by blood,'

Here is another example of prolonged quietude, but the soul is more purified, abandoned and at peace. 'My whole life is an expectation of God. . . . I am as wax in His hands, in blind abandonment to His will, becoming more and more indifferent to everything that is not Him. Everything that He does forms my happiness; what is left is nothing but weariness and death.'

The divine action is different in those souls entrusted with diverse missions. There are often duties that keep a soul away from the prayer of its desire (let us remember that when such desire is ever alive, it is a continuous prayer itself). The state of these souls is in some way

not unlike that described in the prayer of faith. But now the Gifts of the Holy Ghost work more freely, filling the soul more frequently with the movement of God.

The soul receives unexpected touches; their manifestations are shorter, more fleeting, perhaps more intensely sweet than those experienced in the past. God brings it many lights also, particularly during readings in Holy Scripture, as well as while teaching, giving a sermon or spiritual direction. And finally, souls in this state are often seized with a holy enthusiasm, a divine breath[1] when they are speaking of God and the things of God. Having experienced His love, and having suffered at the sight of God unrecognised and offended, these souls are now among 'the convinced', and they yearn to reveal Him to everyone. Ardently they burn to guide all men to the true light, the true Love, the true good.

The cherished *Presence of God* seems to be the source from which every one of these graces flows. How instinctively the soul seeks the divine presence! How easily it allows itself to be drawn into that deepening, silent happiness. His presence is sweet joy to have, peaceful pain to have not. When it is departed, the soul rests in confident expectation; and what intoxicating joy there is on its return! God lets us feel Him according to the circumstance, as we have said. The divine presence can be sweet and peaceful, sweet and joyous, inebriating, glorious; and it can be sweet and grievous, too, when, in the peace of God, our soul is wounded or suffering.

The soul attaches great importance to the realisation of the presence of God, and it strives to preserve this grace. But if à soul would surely be free from illusion, it must make certain that it possesses an increasing delicacy, or *fineness of conscience.* For when this is present, the soul

1 Bélorgey, *Sous le Regard de Dieu,* 157.

would not displease God; and more, it will seek to accomplish the divine will and pleasure with its greatest generosity of love. These two essential elements of fervour are particularly developed in the state of quietude. And if there can be any third element, it is a quality composed of growing *abandonment,* stillness, and a *zeal* thirsting ever more for the *glory of God* and the salvation of souls.

We have tried to trace the contours and lines of the states through which souls of quietude must pass; we speak of faithful and generous souls that have been established in the prayer of quiet and hold back nothing from their God. As God wushes, as He best judges, such souls can be delivered in a moment up to higher degrees of prayer. And if His will is simply to maintain them in this state, God can also draw them upwards to a meritorious height of quietude that is the very perfection of His holy will.

XIV.—FULL UNION, ECSTASY, SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE.

Whereas most souls believe in the divine action as a matter of faith, mystics know it in some degree by experience. And so we have dwelled at length upon quietude, describing its various manifestations as practically as possible, in the hope that our descriptions might prove enlightening and reassuring to all souls. Now we shall only pause among the higher degrees of mystical prayer, for souls rarely rise to them, as the great mystical and spiritual authors affirm. And we trust that our brief sketch first reveals the qualities that are important in this prayer, and then projects them, so that the splendid harmony of divine action is brought fully into relief.[1]

i.—Classifying Mystical Prayer.

The divine invasion moves from the superior to the inferior part of the soul. Saint Teresa's classification is based on this concept. This classification is based upon the faculties. It is divided into four degrees: the state of quiet, full union, ecstasy and spiritual marriage.

'The state of quiet: The powers of the soul are not all seized and distractions remain possible.

'Full Union: All the interior faculties are seized, and the soul is fully occupied by God; the body itself is more under the mystical influence than it was in the state of quiet, but it can still act.

[1] This material has largely been extracted from the works of spiritual authors; we are especially indebted to *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* by Dom Lehodey.

'Ecstasy or ecstatic union: all the faculties of the soul are strongly grasped by the mystical influence; and the senses are so much absorbed that communication with the exterior world is entirely, or almost entirely suspended.

'Now the spiritual marriage, or transforming union differs profoundly from the preceding states. Ecstasies are still encountered but they are of rarer occurrence; and senses now purified and strengthened are less liable to give way under the divine action'1.

Such are the distinctions usually made in accordance with St. Teresa's teaching. Let us be careful not to misuse them, as some do, mistakenly trying to adapt into her classification the comments of other saints who did not make use of these terms.

2.—Full Union.

In quietude, as we have said, the will is held captive by God, but without being 'entirely lost in Him.' And although the higher part of the spirit is divinely seized, its other faculties are neither suspended nor affected very much; so distractions are usually present in quietude, though they were not bothersome during the 'period of blessings.'

Now in the divine action that produces full union, God seizes and occupies every faculty of the soul. The senses are not perfectly absorbed, however; and although a soul is no longer aware of the passage of time, there is still certain contact with exterior things. But with the memory and imagination controlled, the divine action cannot be distracted. This means that all self-examination is impossible. And only afterwards can a soul understand exactly what has happened. Then it is more certain than ever of the abiding presence of God.

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 318, 319.

'The soul contemplates God in a light so pure and penetrating, it possesses and holds Him in so close and sweet a union that it is oblivious of its surroundings; the soul no longer reflects upon itself, and passes with all its affection into its sweetest and Most-Beloved One'[1].

3.—Ecstatic Union.

Ecstatic union is the third degree, coming after quietude and full union; it is also termed non-transforming union. We refer to that obscure contemplation which is a grace of prayer, and not to those ecstasies, phenomena or mystical favours that do not necessarily imply powerful union between a soul and God.

Now this divine action is so thorough that all the faculties of soul and senses are seized and absorbed. At this time there is nearly a complete suspension of contact with exterior things; a soul is not free to go out from prayer at will, and bodily movement is impossible. Not being strong enough to uphold such action as this, the senses succumb. Here is a glorious weakness, though one that is gradually to disappear; and we are assured that it does not occur at all in Heaven. Now the degree of ecstatic union depends upon how intensively the soul is seized. Its effects are marvellous: the soul is detached from all earthly things as well as from itself, and it is filled with knowledge of God. More and more the soul is a flame living with love for Him.

4.—The Night of the Spirit.

But it is not yet time for the greatest union possible in this life. There is still a more profound purification to be undergone, consisting of a series of trials called the

1 Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis,* 136.

Night of the Spirit which 'does not ever precede that of the Senses, and rarely accompanies it. The first Night is followed by a long period of repose; and then, ordinarily, comes the Night of the Spirit'1. For the soul has not been fully freed from its habitual imperfections (the attachments and disordered dispositions of the spirit that were deeply rooted and impervious to the first purgation); and there are the actual imperfections of pride and self-satisfaction that prevent the soul's being perfectly docile to divine action. There must be a final purification. In the first Night, the senses submitted to the spirit; in the second, the spirit is going to learn absolute submission to God. This purification involves a true mystical union in which God gives Himself; but, as Saint John of the Cross says, 'He gives Himself—as an Absence.'

Essentially the Night of the Spirit is a contemplative state; and only as the soul reacts to its purification, does it suffer. There is a mysterious divine action working upon the intellect and will, eradicating pride from the soul; this process is penetrating, and productive of terrible pain. The last of the fragments that are not God-like are consumed in a crucible of divine love, and the soul is purified, illumined and enflamcd.

5.—Spiritual Marriage.

The betrothal is celebrated in a final, crowning rapture, and the soul awaits the perfect, divine, transforming union.

God took the will in quietude, all the faculties in full union, the body itself in ecstatic union, and now He is about to seize the very life of the soul. He could not take the whole human being in a more perfect, permanent or more conclusive way.

By a clear and distinct intellectual view, the soul now

1 Lehodey, *Les Voies de l'Oraison mentale,* 286.

sees how it is indissolubly wedded and united to God. T.'.e humanity of Jesus is present; and henceforth the soul ? joyous vision of intellect beholds the Holy Trinity residing in its profoundest centre. There follows the total transformation; God is given to the soul—in advance —so to speak, as much as such a thing is possible in this world.

At last there is abiding peace, silence and happiness. And if God should depart for a moment, leaving the soul alone, it is only to remind it that a fall is not inconceivable; but a trial like this finds the soul strong in its utter dependence upon Him, Who is its jealous Spouse.

This rapid sketch of the higher degrees of mystical union is intended to give us some insight into the transforming and progressive deification that is the work of God in certain souls. Now we may more readily understand Saint Bernard's mysticism. As we shall show, he soars quickly to the highest summits of contemplation. And if we are to grasp what he means by 'visits of God', for example, we must know something about the spiritual marriage. And in return we shall receive many beneficial lights from the writings of the Saint.

XV.—THE MYSTICISM OF SAINT BERNARD

We should not conclude this study of mental prayer without an appreciation of Saint Bernard's doctrine and teaching. He is the great Cistercian mystic, 'our Master' and a Doctor of the Church. In fact Blessed Guerric was thinking of Bernard when he answered, *Magister noster ille interpres Spiritus Sancti, de toto illo carmine loqui instituit,*[1] to monks desiring a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles. The holy Abbot 'left us no synthesis of that part of his spirituality dealing with extraordinary states, nor did he ever propound his ascctical theories; nevertheless there is a rich mystical theology in the elements of his writing'[2]. Now these few pages will not be a theological study of the Saint's mysticism[3]; they will be concerned only with the way in which he spoke of prayer. zXnd we have grouped his texts to that end. Saint Bernard's doctrine is diffused throughout his works; almost every passage is precious, the product of a mystical soul.

'We can uncover our Saint's mystical theology by carefully, repeatedly reading his works; in them there is nothing artificial or schematic. W'e have his doctrine as he conceived it, deduced from the principles of dogma and asceticism in that kind of mystical harmony which is nothing but a verbal expression of the interior life and an application of the monastic Rule'[4].

[1] Blessed Guerric, *In Nat. Ss. Petri et Pauli.* Scrm. III, 1.
[2] Pourrat, *Im spiritualité chrétienne,* T. II, 33.
[3] We refer the reader to *La Théologie Mystique de Saint Bernard* by Gilson, a book worthy of serious study.
[4] Berlière, *Revue bénédictine,* 152, (1906).

Saint Bernard's Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles was his vyay of instructing religious in the graces that he had inherited and so sweetly experienced. 'Aim everything of this nature that we can find in other writings of the Saint, appears—and far more abundantly—in the Sermons'1. These homilies are his masterpieces. The Abbot of Clairvaux used to give them in Chapter; they reveal both Clairvaux and that ideal which its Abbot and monks pursued and prayed for.

i.—The Character of Saint Bernard's Mysticism.

He 'is speaking mystical facts, drawn out of his own experience and that of his monks'2. So Saint Bernard's doctrine is above all, practical. The fact that it flows from experience makes it particularly interesting, and in no way interferes with its admirable construction. Furthermore» because his mysticism is 'purely spiritual' 3 and disengaged from any exterior, sensible phenomena, it is reliable and less subject to illusion. A German doctor remarked: 'Few have tasted and absorbed (mystical experience) as he did; few have lived it and found there the bread of life, as he did.'

The Saint's humility resisted more than once, only to be betrayed by his love. 'If I knew nothing ... I surely could say nothing. What knowledge I have I will not begrudge nor withhold from you. And as to that whereof I am ignorant, may He instruct you 'Who teacheth knowledge to man'4. . . . Yet listen to me as to a man who is afraid to speak, but may not keep silence. Perchance my fears may serve as an excuse for the rashness of my

' Butler, *Western Mysticism.*
* Pourrat, La *spiritualité chrétienne,* T. II, 98.
* Butler, *Le Monachisme bénédictin,* 96-98.
* Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXIII, (11, Mount Melleray. tr.)

undertaking, and still more the fruit of edification to you, if indeed there should be any'1.

Saint Bernard loved to say that experience alone teaches and gives understanding. 'These things, which I speak of, are altogether divine, and absolutely unintelligible except to those who have experienced them': *Nisi expertis prorsus incognita,*2 which is reminiscent of the hymnic *Expertus potest credere* from the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.

2.— The Author of Mystical Union.

The author of contemplation is 'The Holy Spirit to Whom we are to attribute any good we find in ourselves.3 . . . He is in truth 'the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,' Who . . . has wherewith to light the lamp of knowledge and to infuse the sweetness of devotion'4. Saint Bernard found the two-fold operation of the Holy Spirit in a soul best expressed in the figure of the kiss that the Canticle's spouse desires from her Spouse: 'Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth: . . . for it is no small thing, nor a matter deserving of but slight esteem, to be kissed with that Kiss, namely, to receive an infusion of the Holy Spirit . . . Who is the imperturbable Peace of the'Father and Son, the everlasting Bond, the undivided Love, the indivisible Unity'5. This is the Kiss of the mouth of God, the personal expression of Love between Father and Son.

3.— The Action of the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding.

In seeking 'a kiss of the mouth' from the Spouse Who is the Son of God, the spouse in the Canticle is praying for

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXIV, 1, (Mount Melleray tr.).
* Saint Bernard, *In Cant,* Serm. XLI, 3, (Mount Melleray tr.).
3 Saint Bernard, *Pentecôte,* Serm. II, 6.
4 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm VIII, 6, (Mount Melleray tr.).
4 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm VII, 2, (Mount Melleray tr.).

union with Him, through their intermediary, tr.e He.y Spirit. Wisdom and Understanding are the two lips which the Holy Spirit touches a soul that He wishes ti unite mystically with the Word.[1] The Holy Spirit touches the spouse upon her two lips of intellect and will, making her see and love the Spouse by analogy; for the Holy-Spirit is the personal expression of love between Father and Son, and His repose is in Their knowledge of one another.

Who then better manifests the Son, and through Him, the Father? For the Holy Spirit is the witness Who alone knows the full, eternal and unique embrace in which the Father, giving His kiss to His Son, abundantly communicates the hidden things of His divinity, in suffusions of sweetness and love.[2] Now as He witnesses the divine embrace, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself to the soul, and there is a personal overflowing of the very love that is uniting the Father and Son. In this manner the Holy Spirit is the source and bond of love between Creator and creature.

While a favoured soul is in a state of living, contemplative light, the Holy Spirit can unveil an image of its resplendent and celestial Spouse. Then the spouse is led to Him and in contemplation gazes upon Him. Now this love that the Holy Spirit is communicating mystically, joins spouse and Spouse together in an extraordinary union of love that is at once strong, tender and intimate. At that point Saint Bernard remarks: 'Contemplation comes about by the Word abasing Himself to human nature, with the help of grace, and by the elevation of human nature to the Word, with the aid of the love of God'[3].

[1] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Senn. VIII, 6.
[2] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Senn. VIII, 6.
[3] Saint Bernard, *In Diversis*, Serm. LXXXVII, 3.

By this operation of the Holy Spirit within the soul, by this Kiss, the heavenly Spouse, the Word descends from the height of Heaven in order for the soul to receive Him Whom it desires in the most intimate recess of its heart. And there it *tastes His presence.* He is no longer without, but is now deliciously within the soul[1].

The Holy Spirit's radiation of love within a soul results in a mysterious union of the soul and the Word. This is the mystical union.

4.—Preparation for Mystical Union.

Active Preparation.

But such a grace as a kiss from the mouth of God presupposes a seriously purified soul. The Spouse will not repose upon 'a polluted bed', *lectulus putidus.*[2]

And so Saint Bernard, ever making use of Canticle metaphors, enunciates this necessary, active purification of soul: 'Therefore do you likewise take care to bestrew with the flowers of good works the mystical couch of your own consciences, making the practice of virtue to precede the holy quiet of contemplation, as the blossom precedes the fruit.'[3]

As a faithful disciple of Saint Benedict, Bernard attributes the acquisition of all virtues, perfect charity no less than contemplation, to the practice of humility: 'For it is necessary] that he who aspires to things sublime should entertain lowly sentiments of himself. . . . And as, without humility there is no possibility of obtaining extraordinary favours of God, he who is to be enriched with special graces, has first to be humbled by correction'[4].

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXXI, 6.
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XLVI, 5, 6.
* Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XLVI, 5, (Mount Melleray tr.).
' Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXXIV, 3, (Mount Melleray tr.).

'Humility brings about the birth of our spiritual life, and assures its perfection. It is the labourer digging the foundations of the spiritual structure, erecting it and completing it'1. Saint Bernard understood well how asceticism is resumed in humility, according to the Benedictine principle; for Saint Benedict shows us that a purified soul has achieved its summit.

Now our heart is a vessel made to receive grace; it can hold as much as possible only when empty of self-love and vain glory. 'The balm of grace must have a pure, solid vessel. And what vessel is more pure and solid than humility of heart? Rightly does God give His grace to the humble and rightly does He look upon His faithful servant. Do you wonder why this is right? Because a humble heart is not preoccupied with the kind of human consideration that prevents the plenitude of divine grace from flowing freely into it'2. Humility prepares an expanse that waits to be filled by grace. How closely related are grace and humility! *Semper solet esse gratiae divinae familiaris virtus humilitas.*3 Now this grace-filled humility is mother to all other virtues, it protects them as they grow and guides them to perfection; for the Spirit of the Lord finds repose in a humble, peaceful soul. The Apostle Paul described this grace when he said that virtue is perfected in infirmity4.

Passive Purification.

In its active purification a soul is grounded in humility and enriched by graces and virtues; Saint Bernard regards this beautiful flowering as the disposition required for more

1 Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne,* T. II, 42,
2 Saint Bernard, *Annunciation de la B. V. Marie,* Serm. III, 9.
3 Saint Bernard, *Super missus est,* Homélie IV, 9.
4 Cf. *De moribus et officiis episcoporum,* ch. V, 17.

intimate union with God. It is what the soul desires. And if the desire is really ardent and loving, God may visit the soul. Such visits are often short, and alternate perhaps with grievous periods of God's absence; so a long and clearly determined purification is not the only way in which He purifies a soul. Now in certain passages Saint Bernard points out elements essential in the divine preparation of a soul that is called to mystical contemplation; these are of course the same elements that Saint John of the Cross has systematised in his Night of the Senses.

Hear Saint Bernard: "And a sign of His coming to us in this manner shall be, as we learn from one who has had the experience, that 'A fire shall go before Him and shall burn His enemies round about.' For it is necessary that the ardour of holy desire should go before His face into every soul which He intends to visit, in order to burn out the rust of vice and sin and prepare a place for the Lord. And then shall the soul know that 'the Lord is nigh,' when she feels herself inflamed with that fire; and she shall exclaim with the Prophet Jeremias, 'From above He hath sent fire into my bones and hath chastened me' ,'[1]

Then the Saint is more specific: '. . . especially if thou perceivest thy heart beginning to glow with the heat of His holy love. For not only is it said of Him in the Holy Scriptures that 'A fire shall go before Him,' but also that He is Himself a fire, 'a consuming fire,' as Moses called Him. There is a great difference between these two fires. That which precedes the Bridegroom's coming has heat indeed, but no charity. It warms without melting; it moves without advancing—*coquens, sed non excoquens, movens nec. promovens.* It is sent on before with only the mission of arousing and preparing thee, and to remind thee at the same time of what thou art when left to thyself;

[1] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXXI, 4, (Mount Melleray tr.).

in order that thou mayest afterwards with greatest delight understand what thou hast become through the grace of God.

'But the fire which is God, although it consumes, yet does not afflict, burning sweetly, blissfully devastating—*ardet suaviter, desolaturfeliciter.* For it is truly a 'desolating fire,'—*carbo desolatorius*—which, however, so exercises its destructive energy against sin, that it acts on the soul as a healing unction. Therefore, in the virtue which adorns thee and in the charity which enflâmes thee, acknowledge the presence of the Bridegroom. For it is 'the Right Hand of the Lord that hath wrought virtue.' But 'this change of the Right Hand of the Most High' only takes place in fervour of spirit and sincere charity; so that he who experiences it may say with the Prophet, 'My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.'

'Furthermore, when every stain of sin and all the rust of evil habits have been burned out by this fire, and when the conscience is thoroughly cleansed and tranquillised, . . . thou dost now experience a sudden and unusual expansion of mind, with an infusion of heavenly light which illumines thine intellect, and gives it either an understanding of the Scriptures for the instruction of others, or a knowledge of secrets for thine own consolation. . . .'[1]

The habitual awareness of God became as a fire burning out impurities of soul. But now this mysterious preparation is complete; the mind is no longer powerless and aridity does not besiege the heart and sensible faculties. The bed of the spouse is enflowcred; the soul is nubile and begins to taste of the new mystical union. But is this divine presence permanent? No, the faithful soul will have'vicissitudes',[2]

[1] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LVII, 7, 8, (Mount Melleray tr.).
[2] Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXIV, 4.

distantly heralding the Night of the Spirit which is a shorter, more deeply intense purification described by Saint John of the Cross. But whatever His plan, God does draw the soul; and although He seems to come and go, He is inspiring it increasingly with thirst for intimate union with Him.

5.—Elements of Mystical Contemplation.

The Double Rapture of Soul.

Saint Bernard does not formally define mystical union, but is concerned more with its effects: 'Under the action of grace there is a double rapture of intellect and heart, of light and love, of knowledge and charity'1. Thus espoused, the soul is visited by the Word and embraced in the arms of His Wisdom; and it is penetrated with sweetness from this holy, loving communication.2 The Saint saw the result of contemplation as a particular activity of the intellect and will, under the movement of the Holy Ghost, and as a presence of the Word experienced within the soul.

Union of the Word and the Soul.

'Happy the spouse to whom it has been given to experience an embrace of such surpassing delight! This spiritual embrace is nothing else than a chaste and holy love, a love sweet and pleasant, a love perfectly serene and perfectly pure, a love that is mutual, intimate and strong, a love that joins two, not in one flesh, but in one spirit, that makes two to be no longer two, but one undivided spirit. . . .'3

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XIJX, 4.
* Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXXII, 2.
3 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXXIII, 6, (Mount Melleray tr.).

'But take care, my brethren, that you do not understand me as conceiving the union between the Word and the faithful soul to be something corporal and perceptible to the sense. I am speaking the language of St. Paul who has said that 'He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.' The ecstatic elevation of the pure soul to God and God's loving descent to the soul I am trying to describe as well as I can with human words 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual.' The union whereof I speak, therefore, is a spiritual union, because 'God is a Spirit,* and He desires the beauty of the soul which He observes to be walking in the Spirit, and not 'making provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.' More especially if He beholds her inflamed with His love. Such a spouse, then, so disposed and so beloved can by no means be content either with that manifestation of her Bridegroom which is given to the many by the things which are made, nor yet with that which is vouchsafed the few in visions and dreams.

'She will not be satisfied, unless, by a special privilege of grace, He descends into her from the height of Heaven so that she may embrace Him with her tenderest and strongest affections, and in the very centre of her heart,—*ipsis medullis cordis coelitus illapsum suscipiet*—and may have thus intimately united to her the Divine Object of her heart's desire, not in bodily form, but by a spiritual indwelling; not as beheld in vision, but as clasped and clasping in a close embrace of mutual love. Nor does it admit of any doubt that this mode of the divine presence is only all the more delectable for being so interior. For the Word of God is not a sounding but a 'piercing' Word, not pronounceable by the tongue, but 'efficacious in the mind,' not sensible to the ear, but fascinating to the affections—*non sonans, sed penetrans; non loquax, sed*

efficax; non obstrepens auribus, sed affectibus blandiens.— His Face is not an object possessing beauty of form, but rather is the Source of all beauty and all form—*non formata, sed formans.*— It is not visible to the bodily eye, but rejoices the eye of the heart. And It is pleasing, not because of the harmony of Its colour, but by reason of the ardent love It excites.'[1]

The Saint explains this subject in his seventy-first sermon on the Canticle, describing mystical union as a mutual, spiritual feeding—a manducation, active and passive, involving God and soul—, Tn this way we shall be fully and firmly united to each other, He abiding in me and I in Him'2. It is important to notice that Saint Bernard calls this *Unum consentibile* and not *Unum consubstantiale?* referring to unity in spirit and not to unity in substance.

Transforming Union with God.

The gift of intimate union supposes transformation; the Spouse assimilates the spouse. It is a mysterious and necessary fact that the Spouse is not able to love a soul that is not deiform; and His love increases in intimacy and intensity as much as the spouse becomes like Him. He would discover His own image in a soul, seeing His divine light in its mind, and in its heart His divine love. Only God or what comes from God is worthy to hold the heart of God. *Tanto profecto sibi carior illa, quanto similior erit sibi,* 'For the more quickly she resembles Him, the more tenderly shall He cherish her'4.

Mystical transformation of the soul consists, then, in a progressive deification of its knowledge and love. This is

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XXXI, 6, (Mount Melleray tr.).
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXI, (6, Mount Melleray tr.).
8 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXI, 8.
' Saint Bernard, *In Cant,,* Serm. LXXXV, 10, (Mount Melleray tr.).

the way to mystical union. *Unior cum conformor,* 'I am assimilated when I am conformed to His will'1. And when such conformance has reached a certain degree, union of Word and soul takes place: *Talis conformitas maritat animam Verbo.*2

'The substance will remain,' Saint Bernard adds, 'but re-clothed in a new form,' the form of God Himself.3

We may say that when a soul is in this state it has lost itself. God seizes its whole personality. He becomes all—if only for a few seconds—in all its faculties. To quote Saint Bernard: 'Everything the soul can feel, inside itself, is divine.' Its inmost nature is entirely possessed and activated by God; its very form is one with that of God, its heart is one with the heart of God, *sese conformat et concordat auctori,* its love is that of God, *in eumdem transit affectum.* To be in such a state is to be deified. *Sic affici deificari est'1.*

Saint Bernard understood mystical union to include the transforming union of mystical marriage.

6.—The Rejoicing Soul.

'Happily blessed and holy in mortal life is anyone given an experience of this kind, however elusive it may have been.' It is a foretaste of celestial life. 'And it is only with pain that a soul endures the necessity of returning, falling back down into itself and crying piteously: 'Lord I suffer violence, do Thou assure me'5.

When Saint Bernard speaks of the soul's experience in this Godly state, this gladness in the Word, he declares it an incomparable good that is far beyond any joy or exterior

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXI, (6, Mount Melleray tr.).
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXXIII, 3.
3 Saint Bernard, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu,* n. 28.
4 Saint Bernard, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu,* n. 28.
4 Saint Bernard, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu,* n. 27.

consolation; in fact it is an ineffable good. It can be experienced but in no way expressed. *Illud licuit experiri, sed minime loqui.*1

In his last sermon Saint Bernard's language is a creation of transcendent charm. It is almost as if a breath from the other world into which he was soon to enter, were coming in beforehand as refreshment for his soul. How truly Vacandard speaks of him: 'The Abbot of Clairvaux has celebrated more delicately and heroically than any other, those mystical sweetnesses of the marriage that unites the soul to God'; adding, 'This Canticle is perhaps the most beautiful love-hymn that ever echoed through a cloister'2.

Our Holy Father Bernard spoke at the Clairvaux Chapters to all his monks. Sometimes he excused himself, or rather explained himself; or it may have been a justification: *Inter sapientes sapientiam loqui et spiritualibus spiritualia licet conferri.* 'One can speak of wisdom with the wise; one can speak spiritually with the spiritual.3

And so Bernard, our own Master, our Cistercian Father and Doctor of the Church guides us step by step up to the highest summits. How easily we can excuse him for not having taught the various degrees of prayer didactically, as the modern age WOuld like. But the contemplatives of the Middle Ages were under no such logical constraint. They chanted forth in the liberty and inspiration of the moment: grieving now in love's beginning pangs, now gladly singing out the fullness of that love.

In bringing this practical consideration to a close, let us allow him to present us to those graces that a soul can choose.

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXXV, 14.
* Vacandard, *Vie de Saint Bernard,* T. I, 489, (1927).
* Saint Bernard, *Des dégres de l'humilité et de l'orgueil,* ch. VII.

7.—Desiring Mystical Contemplation.

Can one really desire such contemplation as this—the gratuitous gift of God? 'Perchance you also long for the repose of contemplation?' Bene facis.[1] You do well, Saint Bernard answers. Your desire is praiseworthy. But this grace supposes the complete, active purification of soul that we have described. 'Besides, it is altogether contrary to right order to demand the reward before you have earned it, to desire to eat before you have laboured. 'If any man will not work,' writes the Apostle, 'neither let him eat.'[2] The essential product of purification is desire. And anything but this desire is odious presumption. 'What? To a bed such as thine, covered not wdth the flowers of virtue but with the filth of vice, hast thou the temerity to invite the King of Glory? Is it to repose with thee He shall come and not rather to reprove thee? '[3]

But Saint Bernard extols this desire when it is in faithful, generous souls ; and he would quicken it, knowing how strongly it attracts a visit of the Spouse. T have too much confidence in the word of Him Who said, 'Ask and you shall receive,' to believe that thou shalt go out empty-handed, provided only that thou dost persevere in knocking'[4].

Docs faithful generosity ensure our arrival at this state of mystical contemplation ?

There arc times when Saint Bernard seems almost to affirm so: 'Give me a man who loves nothing except God and whatever is for God's sake deserving of love; a man for whom 'to live is Christ' and has been for a long time—*cui vivere non tantum sit, sed et diu jam fuerit*—; who, whether at work or repose, equally endeavours to 'set the

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. XLVI, 5.
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. XLVI, 5, (Mount Melleray tr.).
3 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. XLVI, 6, (Mount Melleray tr.).
4 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. XLIX, 3, (Mount Melleray tr.).

Lord always in his sight;' whose dominant desire, yea, rather, whose single desire, is to walk ever cautiously with the Lord his God,—*ambulans cum Domino*—and whose grace is adequate to the accomplishment of this desire; give me, I say, such a soul, and I, at all events, will not pronounce her to be unworthy of the heavenly Bridegroom's attention, of the regard of the Divine Majesty'1.

Saint Bernard's beautiful seventh chapter in *Des degrés de Γhumilité et de l'orgueil* shows how contemplation and perfection always go together. We are formed in humility by the Son, in charity by the Holy Ghost and raised to contemplation by the Father1. And knowing how desire for God can far outreach a soul's capability, the Saint knew also that all things are permitted true and unpresumptuous love: 'I am thankful for being allowed to kiss His Feet. I am grateful for the privilege of kissing His Hand. But if He has any care for me, 'let Him kiss me with the kiss of His Mouth.' I am not, I repeat, ungrateful, but—I love. What I have already obtained is, I acknowledge, too much for my desert, yet altogether too little for my desire. I am governed more by desire than by reason. Do not, I bej* of you, blame my presumption, since affection urges me on. Modesty remonstrates, but love is supreme'3.

Saint Bernard is implying that the more a soul advances the better it comprehends the grandeur of divine holiness, and the insignificance of itself. Graces of prayer become sovereignly precious. And aware that it deserves nothing, still the soul's very life is desire. Desire cries: 'Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His Mouth!' and humility cries out:

1 Saint Bernard. *In Cant,,* Serm. XLIX, 1, (Mount Melleray tr.).
* Saint Bernard, *Des dégres de l'humilité et de l'orgueil,* VII, 20.
3 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. IX. (1, Mount Melleray tr.).

'I am not worthy!' This rhythm of desire and humility ravishes the heart of God.

But practically speaking, how is one called to mystical contemplation? Drawing more upon his knowledge as a director of souls than upon personal experience of himself, Saint Bernard realised that this grace depends entirely upon the divine pleasure, and that not all who desire it obtain it, in this life. Concerning spiritual souls and contemplatives, he asks: 'Who are these favoured souls?' and answers, 'That is God's secret'1. In the eighty-fifth sermon on the Canticle the Saint celebrates the grandness of a humility that disposes a soul for this grace; but he does not bring it to a close without reminding us of our Father's ascendent good pleasure in the matter.2 And he affirms that in practice there are many souls that become perfect without mystical contemplation. Having spoken of the joy of contemplation in his third sermon for the feast of the Circumcision, the Saint adds: 'But, as I have said, there are many who never in their whole lives attain to this happy state. Such as these may rest assured that if they continue their efforts with all devotion and perseverance, they shall obtain, at least in the moment after death, that which during life was withheld from them for their own good'3.

The last phrase of the eighty-fifth sermon sums up Saint Bernard's attitude toward the mystical life: 'Great, therefore, my brethren, truly great and sublime is the virtue of humility which can merit what cannot be taught, which is worthy of receiving what cannot be learned, which deserves to conceive of the Word and by the Word what no words can express. And wherefore? Not because these

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. LXIX, 1. (Mount Melleray tr.).
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.*, Serm. LXXXV, 14.
3 Saint Bernard, *Sermon for the Octave of the Feast of the Circumcision*, (10, Mount Melleray tr.).

things are due to the humble soul, but because such is the good pleasure of the Father of the Word, her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ Our Lord, Who is ever all things, God blessed for ever. Amen !'[1]

These are his last words on the Canticle of Canticles—Bernard was unable to finish his eighty-sixth sermon—; they are a supreme eulogy of the great Benedictine virtue that was so dear to Saint Bernard.

Now in all truth, love is the price of this-gift of God. How well he knew it ! And so in order to be accordant with traditional doctrine, and at the same time to safeguard the role of his beloved virtue, the Abbot of Clairvaux distinguished two kinds of humility: that which gives us knowledge of ourselves—*humilitas quam veritas parti*—and that which engenders love—*quam caritas format et inflammat.*[2]. He seems to have held this twofold humility responsible for the marvels of mystical union—when it was God's will and good pleasure. There is another delicate passage in which the spikenard of the spouse is humility; its perfume draws the celestial Spouse:

'For what else can be the meaning of the words, 'my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof,' if not 'my humility has been pleasing to God?' As if she should say, 'It is not by the merit of wisdom I have won the divine favour, nor by the nobility of blood, nor yet by beauty of person, for I make no pretension to such advantages; it is simply because my humility, the sole good quality I can claim to possess, "sent forth the odour thereof".' That is to say, its usual, characteristic odour. For it is usual with humility to be acceptable to God; as it is usual with Him, and, as it were, His custom, to look down with favour upon the humble from His 'high and elevated throne'[3].

1 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. LXXXV, 14, (Mount Melleray tr.).
2 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XLII, 6.
3 Saint Bernard, *In Cant.,* Serm. XLII, 9, (Mount Melleray tr,).

May this introduction to the doctrine of Saint Bernard lead us on to a faithful following of his example.

And if it would bring glory to God and benefit to those practising mental prayer, may our Saint's intercession bring the fruitful, crowning grace of mystical contemplation to all those for whom God wills it.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Orationi frequenter incumbere.[1] Let us give ourselves to prayer frequently. It is not an extraordinary, complicated practice, nor one reserved to an intellectual elite or to a few privileged contemplatives. On the contrary, prayer—which is absolutely necessary for any progress in the Christian life—is intended for everyone, and especially for those who are little and humble, truly children of the Father.

Oportet semper orare,[2] 'we ought always to pray,' and in that simple kind of prayer which we can always make. Essentially it is nothing else but a customary, loving attention to God.

Now it *is* difficult in the beginning, for we must break with sin and its occasions; we must gain the habit of being recollected and turned towards God. He helps us. Have you forgotten the sensible consolation He sends so often, making it easy for beginners to detach themselves from creatures? And then, ordinarily, He hides Himself from us, and we have to work, perseveringly, to find Him. But all the time He is really sustaining us, giving us encouragement and spurring us on. He has a boundless desire for us to see Him. And so He helps, but hardly in a way that can be felt. We are made pure and brought along towards Him, despite our dryness.

He is discovered, if only for a few moments, at first; but then He draws the soul into a sweet kind of converse,

1 Saint Benedict, *Règle,* ch. IV.
2 Luke, VIII, 1.

and soon it is enjoying a simple, mutual gaze, in love-filled silence—the *admirabile commercium*.[1]

God and the soul—what a meeting this is! The more the soul sees God, the more directly it goes towards Him, longing to abide with Him; and at the same time, the more God sees the soul, the more He takes it out of itself and draws it to Him. From that time forward, the soul sighs after God. The work of self-denial that it imposed upon itself, and with no little pain, at the start, is now a necessity. The soul must have it; and purification becomes profounder, more perfect and more easily working. For God Himself is showing the soul the things that are keeping them apart. Passively-undergone purification completes this phase as the need for God becomes pressing and grievous, and as a deeper, more inward and transforming change takes place.

Then God gives a new kind of knowledge and love. Gradually He is invading the soul; increasingly it is despoiled by Him, this jealous God, Who is purifying always and destroying the slightest root of imperfection. Now beginning with the higher faculties, then carefully extending His Dominion throughout its entirety, God conforms the soul to Himself; the extent of this deification is correlated, of course, to the mystical degree in which He unites Himself with the soul. The highest degree of union is the transforming one of spiritual marriage.

God does not refuse these great graces to His saints. Why does He not grant them to us, so to speak, with as much liberality?

Is it not most often because we lack confidence? Plainly speaking, our nature allies itself easily with the diabolical force that keeps us unsettled and fearful. We are quite

[1] *Little Office of Our Lady,* Lauds' Antiphon.

sure that we should have to pass through the narrow way of suffering and death to self; and so we examine ourselves, considering only our own individual strength, having no trust in God and not daring to give ourselves over to Him. We have no faith in His love; we have not a faith alive to His ardent desire of communicating Himself to us, so that He can take us into His intimacy and there 'participate us' in His life. Yet this is why Jesus came. He came so that we should have life and have it abundantly, *ut vitam habeant ut abundantius habeant.*[1]

We do not believe with sufficient conviction that each one of the divine Persons, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, Jesus and Mary are each moment, in their own way, concerned about us. They are begging for our love!

Where is our holy heroism, that absolute mistrust of ourselves which should be impelling us to God in Whom we can have absolutely infinite confidence and trust?

For it is He Who secures and sustains everything we are and do; it is He Who draws us ceaselessly to participate in His Joy and Goodness.

If only we knew the gift of God, *Si scires donum Dei!*[2]

Let us have more faith in Love, so that we too shall say: *Et nos credidimus caritati*[3]

[1] John, X, 10.
[2] John, IV, 10.
[3] I, John, IV, 16.

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by Ottilie Mosshamer

the priest and womanhood is a timely book. For centuries priests have been writing to, for, and about womanhood. Now a woman attempts to write about the priesthood – an almost inevitable development in this era of a re-awakening laity. Yet the optimism and respect that pervade the author's writings contribute a high level of dignity, insight, and practicality to the fulfillment of her basic purpose: to present to other women the essential grandeur and mystery of the priesthood and to give to priests a realization of what modern women think, expect, and hope for in the priests of today.

Speaking as a member of the vast, unifying body of the Church, Ottilie Mosshamer treats of the problems and misunderstandings that exist within the Church in a manner that resembles friendly family discussions involving differences of opinion within the context of respect and love. The author writes as a woman must write who hopes to share her sympathetic and intuitive views with other women on the difficulties that a woman meets in the Church, in her vocation as a woman, a Christian, a mother, wife, career girl or Sister in the convent. Her years of dedication as a social worker in the diocese of Regensburg provide her writings with useful practicality as she discusses the meaning of the vocation to the priesthood, seminary training in modern times, apostolic and sacramental contacts with the priest, the dangers and helps involved to priest and parishioner in daily associations, parish work, the family, and the school.

the priest and womanhood will provide useful reading for priests. Deeply immersed in the spiritual significance of his life, the priest enjoys a wisdom in understanding his vocation that is born of profound meditation and close contact with God. As a result he may overlook the plain fact that all Catholics do not possess similar knowledge of the priesthood. Seeing things from the viewpoint of a devout and brilliant woman, the priest will discover many practical insights info rhe minds and hearts of his parishioners. These may in fact help to explain the misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and at times the open hostility that greet his most sincere and zealous parochial efforts. Although he may disagree with the author on many points, he will find much to examine in his pastoral endeavours. For the priesthood and the laity, closely bound to the mission of the Church, are at present engaged in a mutual réévaluation. Any frank discussions, as long as they are sincere, cautious and tactful, can only assist all. the priest and womanhood will certainly be welcomed as a true contribution to mutual understanding, a genuine appreciation of the vocation of each, and a promise of promoting better conditions of growth in holiness.

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